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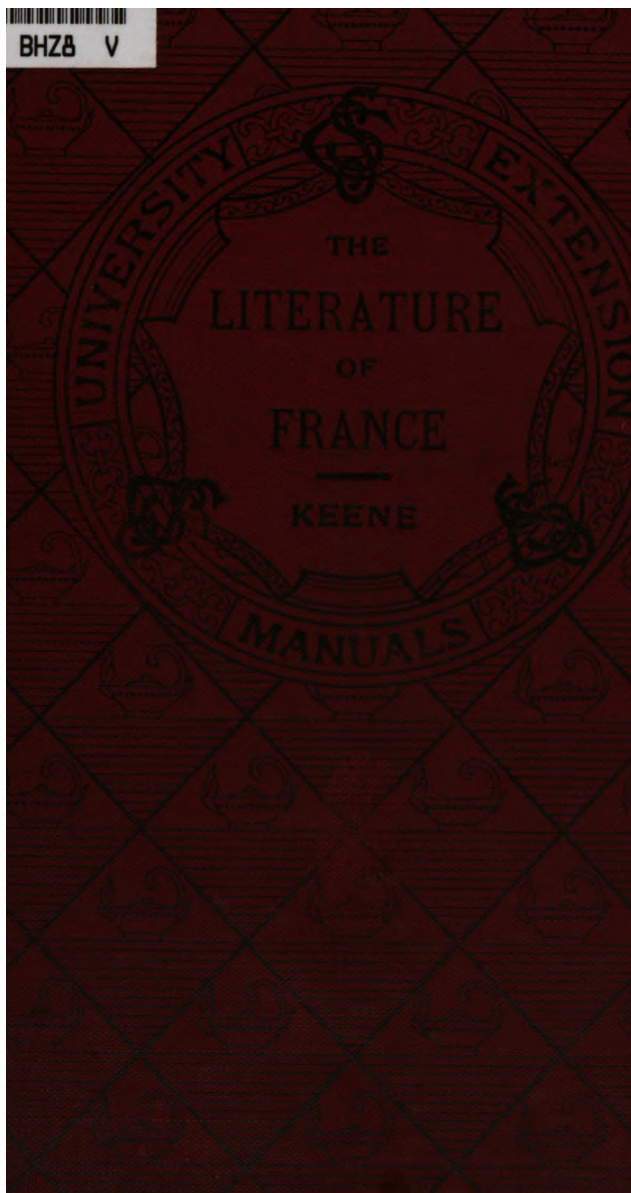
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THE LITERATURE OF FRANCE

THE
LITERATURE OF FRANCE

BY

H. G. KEENE HON. M.A. OXON.

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1892

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN the following pages an attempt is made to guide the student through the consecutive evolution of French literary history, from the beginning of the nation to a time immediately preceding our own. Criticism, however slight, of living authors has not been offered ; nor has the writer obtruded his own opinions even of past writers. Endeavouring to avoid dogmatism, he has assumed the existence of certain rules and standards ; while he has not concealed his admiration of the language, and the consummate exquisiteness of its higher products. In the matter of dates, authorities differ as to the birth and death of some of the earlier writers ; and those given in this work must be taken as an approximation, founded on the best authorities. In conclusion, the author would acknowledge what he owes to the aid of friends ; especially his obligation to the editor of the series, Professor Knight, and of Mr. J. W. Sherer, C.S.I., by whom the proof-sheets have been most generously revised.

H. G. K.

October, 1891.

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A MANUAL

OF

FRENCH LITERATURE



INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE is a word of twofold import, implying :—

- (a) Recorded impressions of things.
- (b) The art whereby this record is expressed and made attractive.

We study the record in order that we may judge, or perhaps practise, the art. But, if we wish to obtain the most use and benefit from our study, we must pursue it in a spirit of scientific comparison. For this purpose we must see that the impressions recorded are those produced on the sincerest and least distorted intellects ; and then, that they are recorded and expressed in the truest and most instructive manner, according to the practice of the leading nations.

Out of such a combination, however, arises a second—perhaps a more important—application of Literature. In the course of our inquiries we soon find ourselves brought into contact with certain psychological problems ; and, before we are done, we discover that in studying the two questions of impression and of expression we have been really studying

life itself. Gradually we become aware of the importance of doing this with the aid of the best guides. The best guides to the literary study of life in one country, however, will not necessarily have the precise qualities that are most helpful in the study of another.

It thus seems as if the points arising out of our apparently simple qualifications are unexpectedly numerous and complicated. We will endeavour to confine ourselves to three, which seem predominant, questions.

(1st) Is Literature for the many or the few? Is it—so to speak—exoteric or esoteric; that is to say, are we to give our attention to the work of those who skim the surface, or of those who sound the depths?

(2nd) Are we chiefly to study the idealists or the realists? Ought we to be shown things as they should be, or things as they are?

(3rd) Should the Literature by which we hope to benefit be conformed to an ever-varying standard, or is there an absolute criterion of excellence, a categorical imperative of achievement, to which all writers ought to conform?

(1) As to the first of these questions, a little reflection will show that it is by no means confined to the subject of Literature, but that it applies to all the Fine Arts, each of which is affected by it in very much the same degree. Thus, for example, in Music some prefer the melodious thoughtfulness of the sonata, or the intricacies of the fugue; others the ancient ballad or the modern burlesque. Rossini, when asked about a new opera, answered that it was neither 'du Bach ni de l'Offenbach'; but such compromises do not endure. So, in the painter's art—'Art' *par excellence*—we have the admirers of Giotto, Botticelli, and Carpaccio. Another school finds all it requires in Raffael and Carlo Dolce, or Delaroche. These schools cannot be combined. Again, some care for nothing but the modern impressionists, or prefer a photograph to the highest work of art. 'It takes every sort to make a world,' and we cannot wonder if a similar difficulty enters

into criticism of the literary artist and his work. There are adepts in whom comprehensibility excites something like contempt, who consider Macaulay a Philistine, and regret that Browning ever stooped to write *The Ring and the Book*. On the other hand a generation not very remote from our own bought thirty-five editions of a certain *Proverbial Philosophy*, of which copies are not now very abundant. Here, again, the reconciliation of these two schools of taste is not very obvious; for it is evident that to blend the two styles would be to shock both classes. Let us therefore suspend our judgment until we have looked a little into the other two questions above proposed.

(2) Of these two questions, the former in the order above laid down is the controversy between idealism and realism in literary art. When Sophocles stated what he took to be the difference between his dramas and those of his great contemporary he said that, while Euripides exhibited men as they were, his own object was rather to show them as they ought to be. It is a question whether what Sophocles is reported to have said was a compliment to his brother dramatist or a disparagement of him. In looking for an answer to this question we find ourselves face to face with the problem which life offers to all its serious observers, namely, *How to make the best of it*. If, in the pursuit of letters we are to rest content with works in which men, and things in general, are described in their purely 'natural' or undisciplined aspect, what have we gained? Like the Lady of Shalott, we have looked upon a mirror in which the outer world has been reflected for us as we sate in our chamber. There we have seen the pilgrim and the pedlar, the knight and the clown, the courtesan and the friar, as they passed along the dusty road, with some background of commonplace scenery, familiar trees, poor cottages, undistinguished hills. We could have seen all these things without the mirror's aid, by merely turning our seat towards the open casement. But, neither to ourselves nor to our neighbours, should we have done any good ser-

vice. Nay, more; to this inefficiency of employment we have to add the absence of selection. If, however, Literature is to be an unselecting mirror which shows us things of no importance, and of which we see all that we need to see when we look at them directly, does not this imply the condemnation of all Literature that is easy, superficial, realistic? We need not require the literary artist to give us what is far-fetched or obscure. The greatest authors have known how to express lofty visions and profound insight, in a style that only requires attention to be found quite clear. Obscurity is not the only alternative to obviousness. Nor is it to be inferred that we are to condemn all Literature that is called 'amusing.' The mind has its seasons of lassitude; and our greatest literary benefactors have not scrupled to minister to those moods. Are not Falstaff and Sancho Panza and the Bourgeois Gentleman as amusing as Peregrine Pickle?

(3) The last of our questions—Is there an absolute standard in the art of Literature?—perhaps admits of no positive reply. The standard of one place or time is dependent upon the medium in which it is evolved. The hymns of the Vedic Aryans were composed to be learned by heart, and repeated on occasions of divine service and sacrifice. They could not form models for branches of the art not then used or dreamt of. The methods of literary art will differ, even in the same period, if the past and present characteristics of the countries in which the works are produced are very dissimilar. In the present age of cosmopolitan intercourse we may see this, by comparing a novel by Tolstoi with one by George Eliot. Yet it is the duty and the privilege of a student of letters to look for identity even in the midst of unmistakeable differences. He will perhaps find in the end that in all the higher literature of the world there is a common element: a criterion which the works unconsciously selected for preservation by mankind are found to follow. There have been times and places, doubtless, when this wholesome practice was suspended; when things evil have survived, and when

violent revulsions and revolutions have taken the place of healthy development. Such times of decadence as the Greeks experienced in the schools of Byzantium and Alexandria, or the Hindus in their Puranic mythology, are on record; but they have never become general, nor have the writings then produced entered into the select library of universal man. We turn with relief and satisfaction to those works on which the common conscience and intellect have passed approval. These mankind has appropriated with delight, preserved with care, and interpreted with an ever-increasing diligence. They have consoled the afflicted, strengthened the weak, enlightened the ignorant: and the different treatment due to differences of place and time, so far from being an obstacle has only proved a further test of excellence. The writings of the Hebrew prophets and Psalmists are but the best example of this truth. The epics of Homer, some of the Greek tragedies and of the poems of Horace, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, many of Shakspeare's plays, together with a few works of biography and history, from the *Agricola* of Tacitus to the *Life of Nelson* by Southey, and some of Scott's novels, may be classed as minor, or uncanonical, Scripture; works which the world has adopted and placed in its universal library. Here one finds the love of country, the dramatic display of courage and pathos, the scorn of meanness, common and world-old springs of sublimity and beauty, and pity and virtue—all treated with due variety.

Therefore, the golden rule is to look to the judgment of the past for our chief guide in the selection of books. It takes a good critic to be quite sure of the merits of a modern book. Fifty years after publication a book begins to be mature; one that has lived to a hundred years may be safely trusted. In our serious hours, at least, let us read none but the classics of their several departments. The student who is well versed in the English Bible, in Chapman's Homer, in the best plays of Shakspeare, and the best poems of Pope

and Wordsworth, in Langhorne's *Plutarch*, and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, has done more to enrich his mind than one who had read through a circulating library, if, in addition, he becomes acquainted with a few continental masterpieces, *securus judicat orbis terrarum*.

Literature, then, is for both the many *and* the 'few,' if the latter be but 'fit.' Let us weigh the words of a distinguished contemporary, whose only drawback as a man of letters has been his recent absorption in political warfare :—

The student of literature, if he be wise, will get a survey of ideas, of sentiments, of imagination, of humour, of invention, as they affect, and are affected by, the ever-changing experience of human nature, and the manifold variations that time and circumstance are incessantly working in human society.¹

The principles thus noted are those which have been adopted in the following manual. The treatment of detail has been applied only to classics; no personal predilections have been followed; and the glorifying of obscure genius, which has sometimes impaired the value of retrospective criticism, will not be attempted. For the sake of continuity, indeed, some minor names have been mentioned, when they have been a real illustration of a temporary movement. The evolution of literary products has been observed; or when—as sometimes happens in France—the changes have been reactionary, and not obviously conditioned by what immediately preceded, that fact has been noted also. It sometimes happens that an epoch appears to act towards that out of which it sprang in a spirit of rebellion. It dissipates its inheritance, partakes of strange food, and consumes its substance in riotous living. But, however prodigal, it is still a son; and the absence of outward resemblance will not blind us to the inward signs of succession.

It will not be found that those writers are always dwelt upon who were most particularly esteemed by their contem-

¹ John Morley, in *The Study of Literature*.

poraries, because their work reflected the peculiar prejudices and fashions of the day. Our examples will be usually found to have been chosen from among those who, while characterized at first by originality of thought and unconventional expression, have appeared to posterity as representatives of their respective periods.

How these 'periods' are to be distinguished and marked off will be another matter for individual judgment. The older method, of arranging them according to centuries or reigns of kings, is evidently far from adequate. Turning for illustration of this to the literature of Great Britain, one sees that it would be worse than useless to speak of Gray, Collins, Cowper, and Burns as belonging to the same period as Pope and Prior; though they all lived and died in the same century, if not quite in the same reigns. Rather we shall find that there are certain states of society, ruling circumstances,—a *milieu*, as French critics say,—which generate natural stages of unfolding, so as to supply natural grounds of classification. In a word, the history of a nation's literature will be seen to be the history of the nation's intellectual evolution.

With one exception, therefore, the purely chronological treatment has been adopted, but only as to distinct periods, often quite antagonistic. We first deal with the *Age of Infancy*; the birth and early struggles of the national mind from the fall of the Carlovingian Empire of the West, and the establishment of the kingdom under the House of Paris. This period may be considered as lasting, without complete breach of continuity, to the end of the Hundred Years' War, the collapse of the feudal system, and the invention of printing. Next comes the *Age of Adolescence*; the conscious endeavour of the spirit of freedom, which began soon after the new birth of the arts in Italy, and went on till the consolidation of the absolute government of the later Bourbons. The third period is the *Age of Glory*; when the intellect of the nation, having learned its power and prepared its

implements, proceeded to gratify ambition in the fields that it found most appropriate. In this period a second classification is adopted, and the vast mass produced is divided into two parts, of which serious prose forms one, poetry and light literature the other. The fifth subject, though only the fourth period, is therefore the *Age of Reason*; when literature, ceasing to dazzle, was content to persuade, until it entirely altered the currents of thought and the whole framework of society. The last period treated is that which still endures, and to which we give the provisional title of the *Age of Nature*, dividing its subjects into *Romance* and *Realism*.

In regard to the facts on which this study has been based, the writer has been chiefly indebted to the following works:—

GÉRUZEZ, E.

Histoire de la Littérature Française. Paris, 1881.

BONNEFON, D.

Les Écrivains célèbres de la France (5^{me} éd.).

Paris, 1884.

DEMOGEOT.

Histoire de la Littérature Française. Paris, 1857.

LEFRANC, E.

*Histoire de la Littérature Française au Moyen
Âge.*

Paris, 1864.

SAINTSBURY, G.

Short History of French Literature. Oxford, 1884.

CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF INFANCY

(a) Birth

THE interest of French literary history is due to two causes: the great neatness and finish of the language and style, and the extraordinary influence of the nation in continental affairs. It would be absurd to deny the importance of our own literature; that of Italy was once highly esteemed; German writers have, within the last century, become authoritative in matters of research, and have even taken high rank in the domain of the imagination. But, after all due allowances have been made, it will still be possible to regard France as forming a very large part of Europe's brain, without which her civilisation would have been but a poor thing. In that active subtle organ the impressions received by other members of the continental body have been transformed, until they have become susceptible of expression in a clear and universal modern Latin. It is no inconsiderable sign of the flexibility and usefulness of the French language that it was the common idiom of Frederic the Great, of Catherine and Maria Theresa, of Gibbon, Grimm, and Voltaire. Uniting elements of Celtic and Teutonic origin with the basis laid by the old Roman civilisation, the French language has derived from the mixed origin of the French people an advantage which will not be found possessed by any race that is simpler and less varied in its origin.

The Gauls originally spoke Celtic. The causes that led to the introduction of the Latin we now find in the vocabulary and grammar, so that the language of modern Gaul is Romance rather than Celtic,¹ are many and complicated. They are succinctly treated in the *Grammaire des Grammaires* (p. 362), where indications will be found of the Romanisation, not only of the Celts, but of the early Franks also. This must be largely attributed to the long-continued presence of large bodies of legionaries throughout the Gaulish provinces, lasting even after the Roman troops had been withdrawn from Britain, and after Germanic tribes had begun to settle on the left bank of the Rhine. Traces of legionary Latin are found in the use of the oblique case instead of the nominative (such as *homme, origine, nation, c'est moi*, &c.). Nor must it be forgotten that the Roman civilisation was long preserved in the municipalities, which, with stone walls and disciplined militia, defended themselves against the barbarian attack that fell upon the fields, and often maintained their Gallo-Roman institutions. The influence of the clergy and men of letters, who long continued to use Latin as a living language, must also be noticed. Claudian has been supposed to have been a Gaul; Prudentius came from Navarre; Ausonius was a native of Bordeaux; Gregory of Tours wrote his history in Latin. These combined influences, the use of the purer Latin as a literary and municipal language, along with its diffusion in a vernacular form among the soldiery and their followers, may satisfy us that, for about eight centuries, from the first conquest down to the consolidation of the dynasty of Paris, the language of the Romans must have had great currency and vogue in some form or other, as a *lingua franca* among people speaking a great variety of dialects, and even, in some cases, totally different languages, as in the case of the Bretons, the Basques, and the Goths.

¹ The structure of sentences, and some locutions and peculiarities of pronunciation, are still Celtic.

It is less easy, perhaps, to account for the disappearance of the Frankish form of German. That language, however, must have been confined to the families of the invaders; and many instances exist to show that a numerical inferiority often compels conquerors to adopt the speech of the conquered. The conquerors of Normandy adopted French in the second generation after Rollo, whose successor was compelled to send his son to the Danish colony of Bayeux to learn the speech of his fathers. The same people in England adopted the English language. The way in which this happens will suggest itself to any one who has lived in India. Surrounded by domestics of native blood and manners, the children of the conquerors speak the native language before they have learned that of their parents. Anglo-Indian children come to Europe; when they are grown up they marry English wives, and their language is not seriously affected. But in the case of the Franks and Normans there were few or no circumstances to obstruct the adoption of the native idiom.

That the Frankish form of German was preserved during the Carlovingian Empire is well known. But the princes and warriors to whose use it was confined must have been in much the same situation as the Mughal Emperors of Hindustan, who—descended from Tartar ancestors—long maintained the use of Turkish as a sort of esoteric means of communication with their courtiers of Turḳoman extraction. On one side there were the clergy and literati, using Arabic and Persian in religion, literature, and business; on the other vast crowds of soldiers, servants, and tradespeople, to say nothing of mimes and courtesans, all speaking the vernacular patois known as ‘Urdu’ or ‘Hindustānei.’ No wonder if between these rival influences the rude ancestral idiom became useless and obsolete. An exactly similar process must have gone on in the Empire of Charlemagne, where the learned men like Alcuin and Eginhard—who could not have understood one another’s vernacular—used something of the

nature of classical Latin, while the mass of the people spoke a mixed patois, which we shall presently find adopted by the powerful and illustrious. The old Latin became henceforth the class language of religion, learning, and law; the Romance, which grew out of the old *lingua romana rustica* of the legionaries, became the patois of the people; the Frankish became extinct, while 'Roman'—the parent of modern French—was preserved by the 'survival of the fittest.'

The first literary appearance of the French language is in the oath, quoted by most of the standard writers, by which Louis the German bound himself to Charles the Bald in 842 A.D. This is altogether a momentous epoch in French history; because, by the compromise then effected, the German element was finally separated and the way was prepared for the delimitation of the future kingdom by the river Rhine. The best text of this important document will be found in Demogeot, p. 54: but there is a copy, still more accessible, in the *Grammaire des Grammaires*. It will be observed that though the verbs are still pure Latin, the article is only used in the objective case, though in the nouns, &c., some declensional inflections occur. The whole text is short, but it is of great significance. When we see, as here we do, how the process went on, by which a learned language was fused, as it were, and recast as a popular idiom, we learn to understand the fundamental fact of French; namely its essentially Latin material. In the hands of the lively races of Northern Gaul, such as Caesar described them, with the aid of some Teuton discipline from the Franks, the language of Virgil and Cicero preserved its orderly and sonorous elegance; and acquired, besides, a flexibility and colloquial ease which were new embellishments.

Then came another and a very peculiar Teuton element. The Northern pirate tribe which settled in Neustria never cared to preserve its own language; we have already seen how soon those settled in France adopted French. Nevertheless in doing so they departed a little farther from the

Latin forms, and helped the separation between the pure Southern 'Romance' and the *langue d'oïl* which was destined to oust it as a national speech. The Northern idiom took its name from the way of pronouncing the affirmative interjection—now written *oui*, and pronounced with a half-aspirate—which was at first *hoc illud*, while the more learned and refined South rejected the barbarous tautology and said simply *hoc*. Their speech, nevertheless, degenerated into a patois, which is now a curiosity but hardly a literary language. The Northern idiom, on the contrary, taking root in the 'Isle of France,' became the language of the new kingdom founded at Paris in the tenth century: although the Norman dialect also exists in patois form, confined to colloquial uses, with the exception of the works of Wace, and a few metrical compositions produced of late years in the Channel Islands. In this dialect there was some latent literary capacity. Not only was it used as the language of business by the early Norman settlers in England—as witness the *Rolls of Parliament* and the old *Year-books*—but a considerable poem, belonging to the twelfth century, was composed in it. The *Roman du Rou* of Wace, a native of Jersey, was written in Norman French, under the patronage of Henry II of England, to commemorate the deeds of his ancestors, and 'Rou' stands for Rollo, or Hrolf Ganger.

The *Roman* of Wace is a long, amorphous epic of nearly seventeen thousand lines, but has very little of what we now consider poetry in thought or diction. The first part thus describes itself:—

Mil et cent et soixante ans eut de temps et d'espace
Puis que Dieu en la Vierge descendit par grâce,
Quand un clerc de Caen, qui eut nom 'Maitre Wace,'
S'entremet de l'histoire de Rou et de sa race.

This is not much more in the true epic vein than if one said—

Years eighteen hundred and eighty-seven
Since Jesus for us came down from heaven,

An Oxford graduate of the name of Smith
Wrote of Prince Albert and his kin and kith.

But the lines, however rude and unregulated, are the earliest attempt at the Alexandrine metre which was to become the heroic form of French verse. This first part treats of Rollo and his son and grandson. The second part is in octosyllabic verse and carries the story down to 1106, when Henry Beauchlerc overthrew his elder brother at Tenchebrai.¹ The shorter lines run thus:—

Si l'on demande qui le dit,
Qui cette histoire en roman mit,
Je dis, et diroï, que je suis
Wace, de l'île de Jersey:
Elle est en mer vers l'occide
Au lieu de Normandie appen.

As will be seen, the rules of rhyming are not yet formed. There are no *entrelacements*, or alterations of 'male' and 'female' rhymes; and as many lines are made to rhyme as can conveniently be managed. These irregularities, indeed, continued to prevail until nearly the end of the sixteenth century.

This *Roman*, like other metrical compositions of the time, is rather a historical novel, written in verse for facility of recollection, than a poem in the ordinary sense of the word; and the very name '*Roman*,' given because of the language in which it was written, becomes in more recent French appropriate to works of fiction in prose but not in verse. Such passages as the following are almost a foretaste of Walter Scott or the elder Dumas:—

Taillefer, qui moult bien chantait,
Sur un cheval qui tôt allait,

¹ Part I is taken from a Latin chronicle by Dudo, Dean of St. Quentin; Part II being founded on the work of Dudo's contemporary and continuator, William of Jumièges. Both show the nascent demand of the unlettered classes for something of the nature of vernacular literature.

Devant le Duc allait chantant
De Charlemagne et de Roland.

[The *Chanson de Roland* here mentioned is probably the oldest sample of its class: but it has not been further specified because the date and authorship are alike unknown.]

Et d'Ollivier et des vassaux
Qui moururent à Roncesvaux.
Quand ils eurent chevauché tant
Que l'Anglais virent approchant:

'Sire,' dit Taillefer, 'merci!
Je vous ai longuement servi,
Tout mon service me devez;
Hui, s'il vous plait, me le rendez' . . . &c.

Of Wace also we have the *Roman de Brut*, where some of the old legends of early British history are so well told. The account of the meeting of Hengst and Rowena is full of local colour and incident.

Other writers of the time have left us specimens of drinking songs; and a very true lyric has been preserved which Richard Cœur de Lion wrote in prison. Richard was, of course, more French than English, and belonged to the South as much as to the North. Of this very song we have a version in *langue d'oc*, which permits us to see what differences there were between the two idioms in an early stage of their respective development. But the Southern language was worsted in the struggle for life; it only now exists as a curiosity, and the source of provincial dialects.

We will therefore confine our attention to the progress of the *langue d'oïl*, which for some time longer continued to be entirely in verse, though hardly what would now be considered poetry. Such prose compositions as were produced were Chronicles, in bad Latin, the lees of the ancient culture; the authors being, as a rule, monks; or, in any case, clerics of some kind. It is not perhaps very difficult to account for the

preference for verse among the unlearned and those who wrote for the laity, a similar tendency having been seen in the literature of other countries. Fragments of verse were composed to be sung at the feasts of the great, or at the fairs and gatherings of the multitude; or else the compositions—coming into existence amongst persons to whom writing and reading were unknown—were thrown into a metrical form, as being more attractive and more easily committed to memory. To some or all of these causes mankind has been indebted for many of the noblest and most enduring records of thought and feeling, for some of the oldest fragments of the Bible, for the Vedic hymns of the Aryans, and for the rhapsodies afterwards brought into one poem in the *Iliad* of Homer.

No one could be expected to remember a whole epic by Turpin or by Wace. But the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Roman de Rou* were evidently popular, and their influence is hardly yet extinguished. Wace's *Brut*, which is little more than a versification in French of the Latin work of Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Britanniae*), gave the first impetus to the Arthurian cycle, which has interested so many great writers, and been reproduced by many, the latest being our English Laureate, Lord Tennyson. The story of Roland found an echo on the harp of 'the last Minstrel.'

Ere long, however, fashion changed, and prose romances made their appearance. In the 14th century Robert de Borron and Rustician of Pisa began those long-winded tirades of adventure and gallantry which ultimately found their culmination in the interminable relations of Scudéri and La Calprenède. The facetious English Archdeacon, Walter Map, wrote a prose novel entitled *Lancelot du Lac*, an extract from which, given by Demogeot,¹ shows the French language in an advanced state of development. In the domain of history a great prose writer had appeared even earlier. Geoffroi de

¹ *Hist. de France*, p. 113.

Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne¹ (1150-1213), wrote the history of the fourth crusade, in which he bore an active part; and his work is still pleasant reading for its grave naturalness and manly style. Nearly a hundred years later, the Marshal was rivalled by the Sire de Joinville, the companion of St. Louis. More personal than his predecessor, he is at the same time the worshipper of a royal and beautiful hero—the saintly king whom he served and loved. He is also master of a more cultivated and modern style than Villehardouin. How charming is the fresh savour of bitter-sweet which he throws round the account of his departure from his home:—

Et ainsi que j'allois . . . et qu'il me falloit passer auprès du chastel de Joinville, je n'osai oncques tourner la face devers Joinville, de peur d'avoir trop grand regret, et que le cœur m'attendrît, de ce que je laissois mes deux enfans et mon bel chastel de Joinville que j'avois fort à cœur.

Every student of French history must know something of the work of this lively, intelligent and amiable knight; at once the Herodotus of a new East, and the Boswell of an earlier and milder Johnson. Some part of the difference between Joinville and Villehardouin is due to the more vivacious and impressionable character of the man: but a notable advance had also taken place in the character of the French language. The southern element—sonorous but weak—was eliminating itself—and the language was incorporating all the liveliness of the Celtic and some of the hardness of the Teutonic. An Italian writer of distinction about the end of the twelfth century made use of French as a matter of deliberate choice—which he justifies as follows:—

Et si aucun demandait pourquoi ce livre est escrit en romane, je dirois que c'est pour deux raisons; l'une, que nous sommes en France, l'autre, pour ce que la parleure en est plus délectable et plus commune à toutes gens—

¹ Died about 1213; v. Martin, *Hist. de France*, iii. 572.

showing that, in the opinion of a countryman of Boccaccio, French was not only more widely known than Italian, but was also sweeter and more agreeable. The book referred to was a sort of encyclopaedia; written for general use and in the language most likely to be acceptable.¹ Adènes—‘The Minstrels’ King’—tells us that the German lords kept French tutors in their families.²

The two events which determined the form which the language was to take and the mould into which its literature was to run were, first, the Conquest of Normandy by Philip Augustus; and, second, the Crusades which terminated under his grandson. By the former event the *langue d’oïl*, reinforced by English influences and by the intellectual training of a law-loving people, became the standard instrument of thought in the provinces north of the Loire, where were the seat of Government and the chief national University. By the latter the experience of the people was extended, and new ideas with new expressions came into the mind of the fast-consolidating nation. The disintegrating action of feudalism received a powerful check, education rose to higher social levels, and a lettered laity began to be found among the citizens. Lastly, the *Chronique de S. Denis*, the romance of Walter Map, and the memoirs of the two military historians above cited, showed the new capabilities of prose, and raised it to a level with verse.

Upon this subject should be consulted the ‘inter-chapter’ in Mr. Saintsbury’s book (p. 152), where the concurrence of Italian and English authors in mediaeval French literature is forcibly described. Whatever England and Italy may have done down to the end of the fourteenth century, it was France that first produced an educated middle-class and an established prose literature.

While lettered laymen were thus improving the lessons learned from the clerical Chroniclers, a new school of lyric

¹ Le Franc, 383.

² H. Martin, iv. 366.

poetry was also arising. The original *Trouvère* was a poor gentleman, who travelled about from one country-house to another, with his sword by his side, followed by a man carrying the minstrel's rebec, but who was prepared to eke out the recitations of the latter by tumbling, juggling, and buffoonery. The *Trouvères* did not at first attempt original composition. As their name implies they, like Molière in later times, 'took their goods where they found them,' and sang the old songs with variations, and what they deemed improvements. But their rhapsodies had a tendency to become serial, and to be united in the form of a continuous tale. Sometimes the theme embraced old Celtic legends, often it owed its inspiration to Frankish tradition, sometimes Greek or Roman names were bestowed upon the characters. But a craving for actuality and novelty stimulated ambition on one side, and a wish to please upon the other: contemporary passions and manners enlivened the tale; till what had been a recital from the store-house of the past ripened into a crude but bright image of the present. The aspirations through which the natures of the men declared themselves also became original. One of the knightly vagrants is recorded to have sung as follows:—

La gloire est ma raison,
Mon harnois ma maison;
Et, dans toute saison,
Combattre, c'est ma vie.

As among the Troubadours, nobles and princes affected the life of the wandering minstrel. Richard Cœur de Lion practised in both branches, as is seen from the pretty *servente* already referred to, which is preserved both in the Southern dialect, and in the Royal author's native Norman. At a later date and in a far humbler rank appeared Rutebeuf (thirteenth century), a plebeian vagabond, the prototype of Villon. His dialogue between a crusader and a non-crusader is full of caustic drama, and shows the spirit in which chivalry was beginning to be regarded even then. A hundred years

later appeared the last of the *Trouvères*, in the person of Charles d'Orléans, a prince of the blood and a dilettante poet.

Rutebeuf, to whom we return for the moment, is perhaps the first instance of an educated French plebeian. In this respect he marks the beginning of the Revolution, and of a class now in full glory. Dwelling constantly on his distressed condition, he sings, in the spirit of Béranger and Murger; and in stinging verse satirises the clergy, who were then a branch of the noblesse. He knows that they are protected by the King; so much the worse for Majesty! This vulgar poet abounds in gay wit and lively satire, which he cannot but discharge; let passers-by beware.

Chanoines séculiers mènent très bonne vie,
 Il y en a tels qui ont grande seigneurie,
 Qui font peu pour âme, et assez pour amie.
 Les blanches et les grises, et les noires nonnains
 Vont souvent pèlerins aux saintes et aux sains,
 Si Dieu leur en sait gré, je n'en suis pas certain;
 S'elles étoient bien sages elles allassent moins.

Here is a sample of the Gaulish good sense, with the somewhat cynic treatment of Tartufferie, which we find so often in the satirists of later days from Rabelais to Voltaire.

The *Roman de Renart* occupies too large a place in French literary history to be entirely overlooked, although on the score of literature it does not rank very high. It is even uncertain how far its original conception belongs to France. In any case, satire had hardly reached the specialised forms and methods of organised society in France; but, though far from the grace and polish of Horace or Boileau, there was in the *Renart* a shrewd perception of human weakness. Thus in fable and in *fabliau*, in tales of beast and tales of men, the Middle Ages found handy vehicles for indulging a spirit of ridicule, revolt, and envy. Most of the Western nations followed this fashion for centuries; nor was it confined to books. In other forms of art the spirit of pessimism ap-

peared, in times that have been sometimes supposed to be 'ages of faith.' There is a pillar in the nave of Strasburg Cathedral, nearly opposite the pulpit, whose capital represents a donkey celebrating the mass, while other beasts assist. Comic and grotesque gargoyles and drain-spouts are found on the walls of many other churches of the period.

The original *Renart*, therefore, may not have been composed in French: brute-satire having been an epidemic in Western Europe. But a French work of the kind appeared about 1236, entitled *Goupil le Renard*; which was followed by other works until the entire collection formed—so we are told—an aggregate of more than eighty thousand verses. It thus records an historic feature, if not a literary one. It shows what was popular in the thirteenth century, and indicates the state of men's minds. It was a measure of the general taste and feeling. Chivalry was not merely an element in the social order, it was also a generous sentiment towards those on its own level. In its aspect towards the rest of the world, however, it was at the same time supercilious, and not very humane. Consequently, the people at large cherished towards it a feeling of sly disparagement. The exploits of the fox, the type of intellectual cunning, seemed an obvious triumph of mind over matter, and were accordingly listened to by the lower classes with admiring ears, and were rewarded with sympathy and applause. After a career of successful fraud, during which Renard successfully meets the great upon their own ground, this mediaeval Gil Blas retires to his castle of Maupertuis, where he passes a peaceful and honoured old age. All this shows a certain ideal; of more dignified and abstractly didactic verse there is no lack. While the members of the envious proletariat were slinging at the armour-plated dignitaries of their day in the character of bears and lions, a more direct, if less picturesque, vein of satire was opened in the *Roman de la Rose*. This work is in two parts, the earlier by Guillaume de Lorris (d. 1260), the later by Jean de Meung (d. 1320). In

more than 20,000 lines the authors employ a fantastic but tedious allegory, where the poverty of ideas is scarcely concealed by a laboured and insupportable diction. Le Franc considers this period as the *Nadir* of the French language.

Certain circumstances nevertheless contributed to make the *Roman de la Rose* popular in the time of general leisure and curiosity that intervened between the earlier anarchy and the Hundred Years' War. In Lorris we find wit, even in the absence of poetry as generally conceived. In de Meung we have poor art, almost the negation of poetry; but at every step one encounters irony, with sometimes an anticipation of the scientific spirit. Improving on Rutebeuf he attacks the nobility, whose pretensions he ridicules in a mood of pessimism that was, ere very long, to be justified by the misconduct of the French leaders during the first English invasion. Nor do the ladies at all escape this satirist, nor the high-flying plume of chivalry. The *gestes* and quasi-epics come in for their share of ridicule. This spirit, answering to the spirit of the age, made the book's fortune. Nor was an envious democracy the author's only patron. That bloody and cunning tyrant Philip, called 'the Fair,' is strongly suspected of having instigated Jean's satiric attacks, as he did the author of the *Roman de Fauvel* when the Templars were to be discredited. The clergy frowned; but the frown ill concealed their amusement. 'Such,' said the supposed author of *Imitatio Christi*, 'were the knowledge and ability shown that there is no book to be compared to this in the French language.'

This candid critic was Jehan Gerson (1363-1429). He was educated at the University of Paris, where he graduated with the highest honours, and ultimately became Chancellor. After some years of trouble caused by his honesty and boldness, Gerson was constrained to leave his native country and settle at Rattenberg, in the Tyrol, where he composed his celebrated treatise, *L'Internelle Consolation*, in which he

attempted to do for Religion what Boethius had done for Philosophy, and employ it as a solace under the disappointments of life. Whoever was the author of the *Imitatio*—and it is still very generally ascribed to Thomas à Kempis—this little attempt of Gerson, sent forth or composed in the midst of a life of polemic activity, appears to be the fountain of that oracle of Quietism.

The only other author of the fourteenth century deserving of special mention is Marie de France (circ. 1260). In spite of her aristocratic name this author appears to have belonged to the ranks of the people.¹ Besides a collection of lays and lyrics, she has left over a hundred fables in which we seem to see a faint forecast of La Fontaine. The following is familiar to many students and is a good example of point and brevity:—

LA MORT ET LE BUCHERON.

Tant de loin que de près n'est laide
 La Mort. La clamoit à son aide
 Toujours un pauvre bosquillon (*woodman*)
 Qui n'eut chevaux ni sillon :
 'Que ne viens!' disoit, 'O ma mie,
 Finir ma douloureuse vie!'
 Tant brama qu'advint; et de voix
 Terrible,—'Que veux-tu?'
 'Ce bois
 Que m'aidiez à carguer, Madame!'
 Peur et labeur n'ont même gamme.

But all this literary spring-time in the nation was destined to encounter a nipping frost. The 'Hundred Years' War'—begun soon after the coronation of Philip of Valois in 1328—suspended almost all intellectual life in France. Save when the lawyers' clerks of Paris sought to amuse the unhappy Charles VI with acted farce, nothing breaks the long silence

¹ She owed her name, perhaps, to the fact that she wrote in English. Martin speaks of her as a writer 'full of grace, sensibility, and a sober and regulated ease.'

but the cool commentary of the observant but superficial Froissart, the first professed French historian. The fifteenth century is the second winter of literary France.

(b) **Growth.** (1337-1500.)

FROISSART (1337-1410) is, in some senses, a precursor. Villehardouin had only differed from the Chroniclers in having seen, and taken part in, the things that he related. Joinville added to this the personal interest of a writer of memoirs. The Flemish clergyman was the first writer of French prose who declared himself a *historian*; that is to say, a narrator who, having inquired into and digested his facts, undertook to frame a systematic record. He was not altogether qualified for his task. He was deficient in learning and depth, above all in sympathy with the people. But he mirrored the latest glories of chivalry. Sensitive observation, a clear and lively style, were joined in him to an admiration of all that is bright and brave. His very indifference conduced to this by keeping out of his narrative those passions and partialities which, in many historians, hold the reader in a state of semi-irritated caution. If we were to characterise him in one word, we might call him a mediaeval Macaulay without Macaulay's political preoccupations. More like a photographic album than a picture-gallery, his *Chronicle* presents a fascinating series of battles, jousts, balls, and court-ceremonies, to which the background of patriotic struggle and popular suffering gives full relief by the very fact of its dim obscurity. The completion of his work coincides with the completion of the fourteenth century: and it travels with cosmopolitan indifference over all the countries of Western Europe which the author visited and knew. He has been well styled 'the knight-errant of history.'

Froissart's well-known story has the freshness of a diary;

as if he made it up from notes recorded on the spot and under the most immediate sense of impression. In the following passage he gives an account of the presentation of part of his book to the unfortunate Richard II of England—

Je le vis en sa chambre, car tout pourvu je l'avois, et luy mis sur son lict (lit). Et lors l'ouvrit et regarda dedans, et luy plut très grandement; et plaie luy devoit car il était enluminé, escrit, et historié, et couvert de vermeil velours, à dix clous d'argent dorés d'or et richement œuvrés, au milieu (de) rosiers d'or. Adonc demanda le Roy de quoi il traitoit et je luy dis, De chevalerie. De cette response fut tout resjouy et regarda dedans le livre en plusieurs lieux et y lisit; car moult bien parloit et lisoit français. Et puis le fit prendre par un sien chevalier, qui se nommait Richard Credon, et porter dans sa chambre de retraite.

In this passage we do not see Froissart in his strength as a chronicler of action; but we see his sense of the situation, his love of detail, and his manly simplicity of diction.

In the continuation of this very episode, Froissart gives us a glimpse of his manner of composition. When he came from the King's chamber he met one of the royal equerries, who—having heard of his object in visiting the King—inquired if Froissart was informed of Richard's recent tour in Ireland; and, on Froissart saying 'Nenny,' the equerry told him the whole story, which the author at once took down, and added to his *Chronicle*.

As a sample of the cool indifference with which he regarded the sufferings of the Commons, and the movements to which those sufferings were capable of exciting them, we may take his accounts of the outbreak of *Jacquerie* in the country round Beauvais in 1358.

Beginning by telling us that the peasants gathered together without definite plan, and with no arms excepting loaded clubs and knives, Froissart adds that, when asked why they did so, 'Respondoient que ne sçavoient, mais comme voyoient faire les aultres si faisoient ils.' After describing how they beleaguered the market-place of Meaux, round which certain

ladies, who had taken refuge, were lodged, he passes on to the arrival of two knights who came to the rescue followed by their men-at-arms. And then comes the end. The peasants (*vilains*) 'qui étoient noirs et petits et très mal armés,' were charged and ridden down by those armour-plated cavaliers; and then 'les gens d'armes les abattoient à grands monceaux et en tuèrent tant qu'ils en étoient tout lassés, et les faisoient saillir (sauter) en la rivière de Marne . . . ils en mirent à fin plus de sept milles.' The tale is told without pity, but always without the least appearance of animosity. The black little villains, with their clubs and knives! Seven thousand of them slaughtered like sheep . . . Naturally, there is nothing to make a fuss about.

The fifteenth century may be divided into two unequal parts. For the first three quarters it was a time of secret preparation and of growth; but the growth was stunted and the preparation invisible. Towards the end of the period a change began; and writers appeared who, though of no great merit, still used a language tending to become modern, who are still relished by all classes of readers, and whose works are even in some sort models to our own times.

Mention has been already made of the *Internelle Consolation*, the supposed nucleus of the *Imitatio*. If it was the work of Gerson, it must have been one of the earliest products of this traditional time. It is superfluous to dwell on its merits. It is one of the half-hundred works that we may call 'world-books.' Charles d'Orléans—already named as the last of the knightly minstrels—lived from 1391 to 1465. His father was the Duke of Orléans—brother to Charles VI—who was killed in the streets of Paris by the Duke of Burgundy's men; and his mother was Valentine de Visconti, a Milanese princess, who died of grief at her bereavement, crying 'Plus ne m'est rien, rien ne m'est plus.'¹ This young prince being wounded at Azincourt, was taken as a captive to England,

¹ Charles was half-brother to the famous Dunois, and father of the prince who became King Louis XII.

where he remained until near the end of the war. His poetry, chiefly written in captivity and exile, is considered by the best French critics to be of great beauty and value, though by no means of the kind that would be expected from the author's record. It is purely literary in character, with enough regret of country to show that the author loved France, yet without any display of those passions which would be expected in one who was at once prince, patriot, and soldier. The allegorical nightmare which so long haunted French poetry is there, but alleviated by genuine humour and observation of the shows of nature. His pretty verses on Spring are admired wherever they are known:—

Le temps a laissé son manteau,
De vent, de froidure, et de pluie,
Et s'est vestu de broderie
De soleil riant, clair et beau.

Il n'y a ni beste, ni oyseau
Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crye;
Le temps a laissé son manteau
De vent, de froidure, et de pluie.

Rivière, fontaine, et ruisseau
Portent en livrée jolie
Gouttes d'argent, d'orfèvrerie,
Chacun s'habille de nouveau:
Le temps a laissé son manteau
De vent, de froidure, et de pluie.

If there were space to dwell on this suave and surprising apparition of the modern singer in the midst of that iron age, we might give specimens of his homesickness, his pleantry on the rumour of his death, his rallying of himself on having to take to spectacles. But enough has perhaps been said to show that the son of the tender Valentine was a memorable genius, in his modest way.

Alain Chartier—born at Bayeux in 1386—was an historian as well as a poet. It is related of him that he was so remark-

was Enguerrand de Monstrelet, a gentleman of the Boulogne country (1390-1453). His Chronicle was continued down to the end of Charles VIII by Duclercq and Desrey. Thus, though the second winter of France produced perhaps no writer of the individual importance of the English contemporary writers Langland, Chaucer, and Wyclif, it will be seen that the quantity of production was far greater than that of England. Two events however were now at hand, which were destined to awaken louder voices, and to give them audiences of far greater extent and importance. The revival of classical learning, caused by the fall of Byzantium, combined with the invention of the printing-press—which followed almost immediately—to put the literature of France (as of other European countries) on an entirely new basis. The last quarter of the fifteenth century may therefore, from a literary point of view, be regarded as the end of the Middle Ages, and the commencement of a new era.

At the same time it is to be borne in mind, as Sismondi has well remarked, that the disgraceful conduct of the aristocracy of the period of which we have been treating was not without its advantages to the maintenance of national civilisation. With a king maddened by early excesses, a queen lost to everything but pleasure and ambition, the princes of the blood, in the early part of the century, got into the habit of making Paris the centre of their society, and spent the vast sums extorted from the tax-payers in magnificent amusements. The invasion of Henry V of England did not last very long; and soon after the expulsion of the English the financial reforms and military organisations began, which marked the latter portion of the reign of Charles VII.

Foremost among the Parisians who helped forward the new movement were the young clerks and law-students of the Palais de Justice, enrolled in the association called 'La Basoche.' This word, which Littré considers a corruption of *Basilika*, indicates an assemblage of young lawyers, con-

nected primarily in a kind of 'Bar Library,' and endowed by Philip the Fair with certain privileges early in the fourteenth century. The members divided themselves into separate companies, with a semi-military organisation, having drums, trumpets, standards, and cockades, and occupied themselves in processions and in judicial proceedings for hearing one another's disputes. The popular dramatic representations of the time exciting their emulation, the Basocheans soon extended their field, and took to playing mysteries and moralities of which we can form some notion by supposing *The Pilgrim's Progress* put upon the stage. The Basoche thus became an important factor in the literary progress of France. It contained the germ of the secular theatre, and at the same time laid the foundation of alliances of the literati, —afterwards seen in such different associations as the Pléiade, the Academy, and the Romantic movement begun under the Restoration. Of the early drama an excellent and still popular product was the farce of *The Advocate Patelin*; of the lyrical movement the first and not least distinguished representative is the poet Villon. The most important of the *Mysteries* or religious dramas of the period is the *Mystère de la Passion* represented before Charles VII on his entry into Paris, Nov. 12, 1437. The author was Jean Michel, Bishop of Angers. It consists of three parts, each capable of being performed separately, like the portions of a Greek Trilogv; and in the course of it there is some attempt at character-drawing. Its success is said to have been enormous. The *Moralities* were scarcely less serious, though professedly 'Soties' or Follies. It is in *Patelin*—of which the date is uncertain, but which is perhaps a product of the Basoche¹—that we first catch a glimpse of the true French wit and vigour, that were afterwards to find their full exponents in Molière, Beaumarchais, Scribe, and Sardou. Patelin is a pleader whose practice

¹ According to Lecky (*Rationalism in Europe*, ii. 310) this piece was composed by Pierre Blanchet in 1468. Hallam says that it was first printed in 1490.

is not equal to his desires. His wife, having reproached him for his ill-success, is answered that it all depends upon his dress, and that he means to go at once and buy cloth to make himself a new costume. The next scene shows the unprosperous advocate wheedling the draper after the manner of Jeremy Diddler in the English farce. He begins by talking to the draper of that tradesman's deceased father—

Ah ! c'était un homme savant,
Je requiers Dieu qu'il en ait l'âme
De votre père. Douce Dame !
Il me semble encore, par ma foi,
Que c'est lui qu'en vous je revois . . .

And then the rogue remembers a favourite aunt—

Que je la vis belle
Et grande, et droite et gracieuse !
Par la Mère-Dieu précieuse,
Vous lui ressemblez, de corsage.

To which attentions the flattered draper replies by offering his polite visitor a seat. The latter, quite accidentally, to all appearance, obeys, and next lays his hand upon a bale of cloth. He transfers his praise to the stuff—

Que ce drap ici est bien fait !
.
Or, vraiment, j'en suis attrapé,
Car je n'avois intention
D'avoir drap, par la Passion
De Nostre-Seigneur quand je vins.

Needless to add, the draper presses his goods, and agrees to supply Patelin's wants on credit; equally needless to say he does not get his money. The case comes into court at the same time with another in which the same draper is plaintiff, the defendant being a shepherd who has stolen his lambs. The shepherd, by the advice of Patelin, affects idiocy. When

the draper is called on to plead he exasperates the village judge by mixing up the sheep and the cloth of his two deceivers, and thus gives rise to the stereotyped reproof of diffuse and irrelevant prozers—

The Judge. Sus! *Revenons a nos moutons,*
Qu'en prit il?

The Draper. Il en prit deux aulnes
De neuf francs.

Bewildered to hear that the defendant has taken two ells of cloth from plaintiff's lambs—with a quantity more of the like embroiled pleading—the magistrate dismisses the case. But Patelin is hoist with his own petard, for the shepherd maintains his idiotic demeanour, and the advocate cannot get his fee. Patelin, in despair, goes to fetch a sergeant, and the cunning client returns to his sheep.

About the same time with this pleasant harbinger of French comedy appeared the reckless but real genius François Corbueil, better known by his nickname of Villon¹ (1431–1500), whom we may fairly regard as the precursor of that large school of gifted Bohemians of Paris, of whom Murger and Musset are the best-known modern types. Villon accordingly stands out from the ranks of his contemporaries. The unification of France awaited completion. The more distinctly Latin language of the south still existed. The rules of grammar and versification were still unsettled in the north. The fashion of allegory and of visions was still in force; and the result of all these things was a cold pedantic literature, in which little true distinction was to be found. Suddenly a man appeared, who has to be characterised as 'a swindler and jail-bird,' twice saved from the gallows; yet whose few pieces, almost condemned by their foulness, yield exquisite morsels of tender grace. Johnson, in his blunt manner, called Gray 'a barren rascal'; the epithet would be more justly applied to Villon, both as to the sterility and the low

¹ In the old French, *villon* = 'rogue.'

moral tone of his genius. The constant irregularities of his life did not allow him to produce more than a few short pieces; but these are of almost unparalleled originality and workmanship. We have his *Testament*, in which he leaves verses and counsels to his kinsfolk and friends, and deplores his own misspent past; the *ballade* on his appeal when under sentence of death; another to ask a loan from the Duke of Bourbon, who was his patron; a prayer to the Virgin, written for his mother; a *Ballad of Fair Women*; and, above all, the well-known poem in which the old women, shivering on the ground round their short-lived fire of hemp-stalks, deplore their lost youth and its pleasures. The following specimen of Villon's verse must suffice; his works are now easily accessible:—

Où est la très-sage Heloïs
 Pour qui fut blessé et puis moine
 Pierre Abélard à Saint-Denis?
 —Pour son amour eut cet assoine (malheur).
 Semblablement, où est la reine¹
 Qui commanda que Buridan
 Fut jeté, dans un sac, en Seine?—
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

La reyne Blanche, comme un lys,
 Qui chantait à vois de Sirène,
 Berthe aux grands pieds, Biétrix, Allix,
 Eremburges qui tint le Maine,
 Et Jeanne, la bonne Lorraine,
 Où sont-ils, Vierge souveraine?—
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

The last mediaeval writer whom we need notice is Philip de Comines (1445–1509). He stands indeed, at the point of junction: in comparing him with Froissart we are conscious of a great and radical change. The older writer, though

¹ Buridan (*ob. c.* 1358) was a scholastic doctor fabled to have been the lover of Marguerite, Queen of Louis Hutin, strangled 1314. For the myth referred to by Villon there is no historic basis.

calling himself an historian, has still the simplicity of a chronicler, and something of the want of depth and perspective. The later, though little more than fifty years have passed, is thoughtful, keeps his head cool and undazzled, analyses characters and events, has almost a perception of the coming of a new time. As M. Le Franc truly and neatly says, we have no longer the troubadour describing tourneys and battles, but the statesman explaining political transactions. His studies of character are unlaboured and unostentatious; but as he passed from the employ and familiarity of Charles the Rash of Burgundy to the society and service of Louis XI of France, he was able to appreciate the minds and motives of both those busy leaders, and to draw conclusions as to the value of their labours. Of the overthrow of the Duke of Burgundy by the Swiss he has given a wise and mournful estimate:—

Voici la première malaventure que ce duc avoit jamais eue en toute sa vie. De toutes ses autres entreprises il en avoit eu l'honneur et le profit. Quel dommage lui advint ce jour, pour user de sa teste, et mépriser conseil? Quel dommage en a receu sa maison, et en quel estat est-elle encores, et en adventure d'estre d'ici à longtemps? Quantes sortes de gens lui en devinrent ennemis, et se déclarèrent qui le jour de devant temporisoient avec lui et se feignoient amis!

On the career of Louis XI he is full and sympathetic:—

Entre tous ceux que j'ai jamais connus, le plus sage, pour soi tirer d'un mauvais pas en temps d'adversité, c'estoit le roi Louis XI . . . le plus humble en paroles et en habits, et qui plus travailloit à gagner un homme qui le pouvoit servir, qui le pouvoit nuire. . . . Il estoit naturellement ami des gens de moyen estat, et ennemi de tous grands qui se pouvoient passer de lui.

Yet this able and powerful monarch, who kept others in cages eight feet square, had but 'une petite cour de chateau pour se promener.' Did not the king, then, suffer as much as he made others suffer, confining himself as closely as he

confined his prisoners? After summing up the sorrows of the politic king, and of the other grandees of the time, Cominès thus concludes his reflections :—

A parler naturellement, comme homme qui n'a aucune littérature, mais quelque peu d'expérience et sens naturel, n'eût-il pas mieux valu à eux et à tous autres princes et hommes de moyen estat qui ont vécu sous ces grands . . . élire le moyen chemin en ces choses? C'est, à scavoir, moins se soucier et moins travailler, et entreprendre moins de choses, et plus craindre à offenser Dieu et à persécuter le peuple et leurs voisins par tant de voies cruelles . . . et prendre des aises et plaisirs honnêtes? Leurs vies en seroient plus longues. Les maladies en viendroient plus tard : et leur mort en seroit plus regrettée et de plus de gens, et moins désirée.

Notwithstanding the disclaimer of 'literature,' we see that the style and spirit are far on the way to become modern. The middle age is over. Not that one can point to any special day, or year, in which the change took place: like all such processes it was gradual, and, for the most part, unobserved by contemporaries. Even before the final expulsion of the English, the councillors of Charles VII, mostly men of the middle classes, had determined to put an end to the anarchy from which the country was suffering. The result of the session of 1439, though only attended by the States-General of the North, had been an enactment for a yearly budget and a standing army. This alliance between the people and the Crown was followed up by the continuous policy of the next king, Louis XI, and bore fruit before the end of that monarch's reign. By the assembly of the States at Tours in April, 1468, the king had set on foot a movement for putting down abuses and maintaining the unity of the kingdom. Early in the reign of his successor (January, 1484), another session was held, also at Tours, where almost all the 'nations' contained in what is now called 'France' were assembled;¹ the postal service was commenced, and a properly constituted Council of State was formed in which

¹ Brittany was not incorporated till 1492.

twelve representative deputies found a place. The language of the South had become a *patois*, the language of the North had become the official vehicle of society, of politics, of religion, and of science. This language, at the same time, took its last marked development: all synthetic forms disappeared; the last traces of case-inflection passed away, and the articles and personal pronouns took the office that they still hold, as 'subject' and as 'object.' The first printing-press was set up at Paris in 1469; before the end of the century it had issued no less than 751 works.¹ In 1494 Charles VIII invaded Italy, where the classical Renaissance was already fully established; and the intercourse between the two countries, which then began, poured an unceasing stream of civilising influence into the more wealthy and more powerful nation.

Among other symptoms of the approach of the modern spirit in literature, during the reign of Louis XI, may be just mentioned, Guillaume Coquillart, the author of two semi-political squids, the *Monologue du Gendarme Cassé*, and the *Ballade des États Généraux*; and (somewhat earlier) Eustache Deschamps, who has been called the Béranger of the fifteenth century. The *Ballade*, in which Deschamps compares the France of his day to a forest wherein beasts of prey wander robbing sheep and oxen, is pointed and terse, with a refrain of 'Sà, de l'argent, sà, de l'argent!' which is quite in the manner of the modern minstrel. The author was a soldier and magistrate under Charles VII. Olivier Basselin was another song-wright of these times whose habitat—the valley of the Vire—has given the name to a class of ballads known by the name of *Vaudeville*, derivatively appropriated to a farce with interspersed songs.

¹ It is said that the first book printed, with a date, at Paris was the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, issued in 1477 by Pasquier Bonhomme. By the end of the century there were printing establishments in most of the chief towns of the kingdom (*Mediaeval France*, by Gustave Masson).

CHAPTER II

THE AGE OF ADOLESCENCE : THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

THE multiplication of books, coinciding with the unification of the kingdom, gave the necessary impetus to the creation of a national literature. Instead of being a luxury, books became a necessity; and the inevitable law of supply and demand ere long created a class of authors by profession. The first impulse, however, still came from above. The young king, Francis I, was a type of the French Renaissance, bold, splendid, and unprincipled; and his court was a reflection of himself in habits and character. The first poet of the French Renaissance was the royal page, Clément Marot; the first novel-writer was Margaret of Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Marot's patroness and friend. Clément Marot, the son of an earlier and less distinguished writer, Jean Marot, was born at Cahors, 1495, and early in life became the page of Francis, who was almost his coeval. There is still something in him that recalls the *trouvères*; he has the gay delicacy of Charles d'Orléans and something of the vigour of Villon. But the fact that he edited the works of the last-named, and in doing so found it requisite to add explanatory notes, shows the rapid change that was taking place in the language. The world was still young, and some youthful simplicity is still appropriate. But Marot, as M. Demogeot points out, is the first type of the French mind in its distinctive character. Villon, startling in strength of colour and

sincerity of expression, reminds you that his art was inartistic; in Marot you find the 'literary man' writing with consciousness of his task and his duties. La Harpe devoted many pages of his course of lectures, delivered in 1797, to Marot, and showed by copious extracts the reasons for his sentence to the effect that Marot marks the first epoch in existing French poetry. This is due less to any excellence in his workmanship than to the special gift that shines in what he has produced. In the former the skilful critic has indicated many faults, shortcomings, and instances of crudeness common to all French poetry down to Malherbe.¹ But of his peculiar talent he declares plainly:—'he had a talent infinitely superior to all that had gone before.' The works of Marot are as easily accessible as those of Villon; and the following small samples of his style must content us here. Writing to his royal master to ask a loan rendered needful by the dishonesty of his servant, he commences the tale of his loss by the following arch description of the cause of it:—

J'avais un jour un valet, de Gascogne,
Gourmand, ivrogne, et assuré menteur,
Pipeur, larron, jureur, blasphémateur,
Sentant la hart de cent pas à la ronde—
Au demeurant, le meilleur fils du monde.

To a lady who asked if he had burned her letter, as she had begged him to do, Marot wrote:—

Aucune² fois au feu je la mettais
Pour la brûler, puis soudain l'en ôtais,
Puis la remis, et puis l'en reculai;
Mais à la fin—à regret—la brûlai,³

¹ The French still speak of a 'style marotique' (v. Littré *in voc.*).

² An Archaicism still preserved in Jersey French. *Aucun* is not usually employed in modern French, except where negation—or, at least, doubt—is to be implied.

³ Marot is the last poet who does not follow the alternation of rhymes exactly.

Disant :—‘ O lettre ! ’—après l’avoir baisée—
‘ Puisqu’il le faut tu seras embrasée ’ ;
Car j’aime mieux deuil en obéissant
Que tout plaisir en désobéissant.

These gentle pleasantries, so gracefully expressed, help to justify La Harpe’s opinion ; certainly there is something here that we do not find in Charles, or in Villon.

The lady (1492–1549) to whose letter so much attention was paid was no other than the king’s sister, whom Marot called his ‘ sister-in-poetry.’ This royal lady was first Duchess of Alençon. Then becoming a widow and afterwards marrying the King of Navarre, she gave birth to Jeanne d’ Albret, who became in due course the mother of Henri IV. Attached, though in a somewhat timid manner, to the Reformation, she protected Marot when he was imprisoned on a charge of heresy. Under the Italian influence to which the French Court was so generally indebted in her time, she produced a *Heptaméron*, or ‘ Seven days’ tale,’ which shows invention, and a certain broad humour in description. The painting is however, Dutch rather than Italian ; and the influence of Boccaccio is traceable rather in the freedom of manners than in the idyllic delicacy found in the southern original. It is unpleasant to condemn a lady’s writing for coarseness, but the habits of the time and place must be remembered. The best poet of Marot’s school was, perhaps, Mellin de St. Gelais (d. 1558) who is mentioned by Voillet-le-Duc as the first French epigrammatist. His so-called epigrams, however—like those of Voiture and many later poets—are longer than might be expected from the name, and more resemble madrigals, or short and pointed metrical anecdotes. It should also be noted, as a characteristic of the times, that Marot got great fame by his sacred poetry—chiefly translations from the Bible.

Except in a few cases of rare originality, the literature of this period showed an Italian bias, more or less. The jurists of the sixteenth century, of whom the chief are Cujas (1520–

1590) and Dumoulin (1500-1566), owed their impulse to Alciatia, a legal writer brought from Florence by King Francis I. La Boétie (the friend of Montaigne) and Bodin, both born in 1530, are of the school of Machiavelli; although the one surpassed his master in point of science, as much as the other did in stern antique morality. In his burning attack on monarchy (*le Contre un*) La Boétie anticipates the writers of the Revolution:—

Comment se peut-il que tant d'hommes, tant de bourgs, tant de villes, tant de nations endurent quelque fois un tyran seul qui n'a puissance que celle qu'on lui donne, qui n'a pouvoir de nuire sinon de tant qu'ils ont vouloir d'endurer? Souffrir . . . non pas d'une armée, non pas d'un camp barbare, contre lequel il faudrait dépendre son sang et sa vie, mais d'un seul, . . . et souvent du plus lâche et féminin de la nation!

La Boétie was also a poet; and Montaigne tells Mme de Grammont how he preserved some of his sonnets.

Another writer, known to have been a favourite of the great essayist, is Amyot, the translator of Plutarch (1513-1593). Montaigne acknowledges Amyot as the necessary forerunner and almost father of his style; 'It is to him,' says he, 'that we dunces owe that at this hour we can either read or write.'

But the great master of French literature in the early part of this period is, unquestionably, Rabelais. Born in a tavern near Chinon in 1483, educated as a monk, as a physician, as a jurist, this encyclopaedic man was by turns a librarian, a secretary, and a parish priest. His great work, begun about 1532, was partly inspired by the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More; and it has been compared by Sainte-Beuve to the comic work of Shakspeare and Ariosto. Rabelais is the glory of the early French Renaissance, and his writings are as popular now as when they first appeared, in spite of their coarse images and crude language. He is, in fact, incomparable: a Homeric buffoon, the Brutus of letters, hiding all

manner of deep wisdom and pathos in a case of the coarsest scurrility. His utterly abnormal farrago has been admirably translated into our language by Sir Thomas Urquhart, a Scottish Cavalier. The English of the time of the Stuarts was quite equal to the reproduction of all the immodesty of the original. But, happily, the good in Rabelais so far overcomes the evil that a very presentable residuum of Urquhart's version has been found producible in recent days (*v.* Morley's Universal Library: *The life of Gargantua and the heroic deeds of Pantagruel*, London, 1886). In his introduction Mr. H. Morley reminds us that, though in the jesting of Rabelais there is much coarseness, he must only bear part of the blame. He wrote what pleased his time. Indeed his work did far more than please: its ill-savour formed an attraction to the rough readers to whom it was addressed; but it also served to distract attention from the real meanings of the satire. 'It had so little relation,' adds the editor, 'to the essence of the book that no real student of Rabelais will be surprised to find how little is lost in bringing Gargantua and Pantagruel—free from all reasonable occasion of offence—straight home among us all.' Coleridge classed Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakspeare, Dante, Cervantes: 'I could write,' said he, 'a treatise in praise of the moral elevation of his work which would make the Church stare and the conventicle groan.'

It can hardly be necessary to say much more in Rabelais' favour here. His apology, in his own words, may be cited, not only as a sample of his French, but as a statement of his view of his own mission:—

Le sens littéral nous offre matières assez joyeuses, toutefois pas demeurer ne faut—comme au chant des sirènes—mais interpréter à plus haut sens ce que par aventure nous pensons dit en gaieté de cœur. Le chien est, comme dit Platon, la bête du monde la plus philosophique. Si vous l'avez vu vous avez pu noter de quelle dévotion il guette un os, de quel soin il le garde, de quelle ferveur il le tient, de quelle prudence il l'entame, de quelle affection il le

brise, et de quelle intelligence il le suce. Qui l'induit à le faire? Quel est l'espoir de son étude? Quel bien prétend-il? Rien plus qu'un peu de moëlle.

In the same way he invited his readers to examine his greasy books, to break their bones, and to extract the marrow.

Contemporaneous with Rabelais was an association which in some measure forestalled the work of the modern Academy by a determined effort to purify and regulate the French language. Various opinions have been held of the work of the *Pliade*, whose manifesto was drawn up, in 1558, by Joachim du Bellay, under the title of *Défense et Illustration de la langue française*. Among the other members or favourers of the society were Ronsard, Daurat (called Auratus), Baïf, Remi Belleau, and Antoine Muret; but Ronsard and Du Bellay are the only men whose works are now remembered.¹ The central idea was that the practice of the early French writers had impoverished the language. Marot was pleasant, but no more. The time of flowers had come, but not that of fruit. As Demosthenes and Horace, Virgil and Cicero, had elaborated Greek and Latin, so should we. 'Il faut transformer en soi,' so wrote Du Bellay, 'les meilleurs auteurs; et—après les avoir digérés—les convertir en sang et en nourriture.' 'Lis donc,' he says elsewhere, in the very words of Horace, 'et relis premièrement ô poëte futur, les exemplaires grecs et latins.' No more 'rondeaux, ballades, virelais, chansons, et autres épiceries qui corrompent le goût de notre langue.' They were to throw themselves into epigrams, like Martial; or to imitate the elegiac writing of Ovid, Tibullus, and Propertius: and all with a lute 'tuned to the Greek and Roman lyre.' Du Bellay's own style was better than that of his pupil. Taking his principles quite literally, Ronsard (1524-1585), a young nobleman who had

¹ La Harpe gives the seven stars of the French Pleiad,—Belleau, Baïf, Jodelle, Dorat (or Daurat), du Bellay, Ponthus, and Ronsard.

the misfortune to lose his hearing, went into the opposite extreme to that afterwards adopted by Wordsworth in his celebrated 'Preface.' A poetic language was to be created, and kept holy from the familiarising uses of daily life. Not only was the style of the Latin verse writers to be made a model in French poetry, but their very words were to be made French and used in a special poetic dialect. Another and better idea was to adapt old French words to the new movement by what was called *provignement*, that sort of propagation still so happily practised among the Germans. He also followed the ancient Greek and Roman fashion of compound epithets, like *altisonans*. As an example of the former we have Ronsard using *verver* and *vervement*, a verb and adverb derived from *verve*, a word which has somewhat altered in meaning, but in those days meant 'caprice.' Of the latter we shall find some extreme instances when we come to Du Bartas. Ronsard's improvements are cold-blooded—rather in the old sense of *verve* than in its modern meaning—and have been compared to artificial flowers, sterile and without perfume. But he possessed a natural grace, and even the germ of an acquired skill which might have made his success greater had his ambition only been less. Some of his minor efforts retain a share of popularity: such, for example, as the following pretty couplet:—

Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en va, Madame :
Las ! le temps non : mais nous, nous en allons ;

or, still better, this:—

Mignonne ! allons voir si la rose
Qui, ce matin, avait déclosé
Sa robe de pourpre au soleil,
A point perdu, cette vêprée,
Les plis de sa robe pourprée
Et son teint—au vôtre pareil.

La Harpe judged Ronsard with severity, declaring that the practice of engrafting servile copies of classic forms upon an

idiom to which they were unsuited was barren work that showed no talent. As regards conception, he considers him 'common,' however inflated. His invention was cold—witness the dull intolerable epic that he wrote with the title of *La Franciade*. Nevertheless, Ronsard dazzled his contemporaries because he was a reformer. His style displayed a pomp till then unknown in French literature, and it harmonised with the classic re-birth then appearing, and the new admiration of the ancient tongues and books of Greece and Rome. The critic of the eighteenth century blames Ronsard's practice of *enjambement*, i.e. taking the sense beyond the couplet, which we shall hereafter find esteemed a beauty in a newer school. Some of his minor lyrics, however, are still favourites, and show a genuine poetic vein. The little ode already quoted cannot be surpassed, in the whole range of work of its sort, for elegance and a kind of tender and sympathetic banter. There is a sonnet of Ronsard's which deserves still higher praise :—

Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle,
Assise auprès du feu, dévidant et filant,
Direz, chantant mes vers, et vous émerveillant,—
'Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j'étais belle.'

Lors vous n'aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
Déjà sous le labeur à demi sommeillant,
Qui, au bruit de Ronsard, ne s'aille réveillant,
Bénissant votre nom de louange immortelle.

Je serai sous la terre; et, fantôme sans os,
Par les ombres myrteux je prendrai mon repos;
Vous serez au foyer une vieille accroupie,
Regrettant mon amour et votre fier dédain :
Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain,
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie.

Such was Ronsard at his best; and we can only regret that, by his loyalty to a false school, he was prevented from doing more work of the same lovely kind.

Of what that school was capable may be judged by the extravagancies of its more feeble disciples, such as the author of the following address to Bacchus:—

O Cuisse-né, Archète, Hyménien,
Bassare, Roi, Rustique, Eubolien,
Nyctelien, Trigone, Solifère,
Vengeur, Manic, Germe des dieux et père
Nomien, Double, Hospitalier,
Beaucoup-forme, Premier, Dernier,
Lenéan, Porte-sceptre, Grandtme,
Lysien, Baleur, Bontme,
Nourri-vigne, Aime-pampre, enfant !
Gange te vit triomfant.

This pedantic dithyramb is by Bertrand Bergier, though sometimes ascribed to Ronsard, and even printed in his collected works.

Ronsard's fame, in fact, encountered the stern uncompromising nemesis that waits on men, of whatever ability, who abandon themselves unreservedly to transitory crazes.

Another of the Pleiad group, Joachim du Bellay, was less ambitious and more successful. It is true that very little of his work has proved enduring, but that little shows high quality. His *Poète Courtisan* is the first French specimen of satire in Alexandrine metre, afterwards used so well by Mathurin Regnier and Boileau. Among minor pieces, *Le Vannneur* is a household word.

A vous, troupe légère,
Qui d'aile passagère
Par le monde volez,
Et d'un sifflant murmure
L'ombrageuse verdure
Doulcement esbranlez,

J'offre ces violettes,
Ces lys et ces fleurettes,
Et ces roses icy,
Ces vermeillettes roses

Sont frechement écloses,
Et ces œillets aussi.

De vostre douce haleine
Eventez cette plaine
Eventez ce séjour,
Cependant que j'ahanne
A mon bléd que je vanne
A la chaleur du jour.

It may be well to note that a '*vanneur*' is one who uses a *van*; and a *van* is a two-handled, flat osier basket, representing the *vannus* of the ancient Romans. It was used—as it still is in India and perhaps in backward parts of Europe—to clean the grains of corn by shaking them and tossing them into the air, as explained in the dictionaries (*v. Larousse and Littré in voc.*). The little song by Du Bellay is a translation from the Latin of Navagero, or Andreas Naugerius, the Italian humanist; but it is a vast improvement on the original lines, which are no more than these:—

Aurae, quae levibus percurritis aëra pennis,
Et strepitis blando per nemora alta sono !
Serta dat haec vobis, vobis haec rusticus Idmon
Spargit odorato plena canistra croco :
Vos lenite aestum, et paleas sejungite inanes,
Dum medio fruges ventilat ille die.

Here the subject is not unskilfully laid out; but life and emotion awaited the touch of the translator, who had seen in his native Beauce the spent labourer refreshed by the light summer-breeze that blew the chaff away from the winnowed grain. This sincerity of report, or what Wordsworth has called 'writing with the eye on the object,' is a true criterion of the poetic artist. Whether the work be done in fresco or in filigree is nothing. The candid critic will not greatly heed whether the vehicle be marotism ('de Marot l'élégant badinage,' as Boileau calls it) or whether a more directly rhetorical literary style be adopted. His chief business will

be to inquire, with competence and honesty, whether he is dealing with an earnest attempt to represent what Hugo has called 'things seen.' That is the great question: does the artist paint what he has witnessed, so as to reproduce his vision for the public?

It is only when *matter* is treated as a thing of little moment, and *manner* becomes all-in-all, that we feel the school of literature so employed to be worn out, and that there must be a clean sweep and a new departure. It is the great merit of the Pleiad—Ronsard's pedantries notwithstanding—that this truth was felt, if not distinctly understood by its members: and their movement deserves attention as an essential stage in the development of the national mind.

Such was the earlier epoch of the literary French Renaissance, and such were the chief men by whom it was made, or who helped to make it. We must not, however, leave the sixteenth century without some notice of the rise of Protestantism in France, and the growth of pulpit eloquence, and of political and satirical composition; all due, in great measure, to the activity of the printing-press. The Pleiad, and those who acted with it, were the founders of modern French versification as an art; and as such they gave a stimulus to the formation of the language. The prose-writers were not nearly so important, at least in regard to literary influence. De Thou wrote his History in Latin. The Huguenot pamphleteers were more in earnest about their matter than about their manner. Brantôme, and many minor memoir-writers, are still extant as samples of the simple boyish style of the time—for the pedantry of the Pleiad did not extend to prose.

Calvin, Jean Cauvin, born in 1509, dedicated to Francis I his *Institution de la religion chrétienne*: and the dedication has been admired for its address and reasoning. The book had a certain correspondence to the logical side of the French character; and it is a proof of the power of Calvin's austere and legislative character, that his doctrines have formed the basis of French Protestantism to the entire exclusion of the

school of Luther. The language of his book is credited by M. Demogeot with the merit of this success; being at once clear and convincing, popular and noble.

Another movement soon appeared: it was the Catholic reaction, whose political side was shown in the famous 'League.' The first symptoms of this movement appeared in 1576: Martin (ix. 430) gives the fullest account, with the text of the 'acts' of the first council. The Marshal de Montluc wrote soldierly commentaries from the ultra-Catholic side, which have been compared to the writings of Caesar. A distinguished lady-writer was Marguerite, first wife of Henri IV. None, however, of the prose of the end of the sixteenth century can be compared with that of Montaigne and Rabelais for intrinsic beauty, or for authority and influence with posterity.

For, equal in rank to Rabelais, though separated from him by nearly half a century, during which France was little more than a scene of crime and confusion, must be placed Michel de Montaigne. Indeed, these two lights shine—the Dioscuri of their epoch—in the stormy darkness of the time; and they have hardly been surpassed by any writer of their country in quieter and more civilised days.

Michel Eyquem, Lord of Montaigne, near Bordeaux (1533–1592), was a country gentleman's son, who, after travelling in Italy and serving in Bordeaux as Mayor of the city, settled down for the remainder of his life in his country house, where he evidently enjoyed the happiness due to a calm, and in some respects almost cold character, yet not unmixed with an element of cultured, and at the same time sympathetic curiosity. Nothing is more surprising than the modern tone of mind in this mediaeval magnate: and it affords a sure mark of superiority, because it shows that he was in advance of his contemporaries on the path of real progress. While the Valois dynasty was slowly expiring on the bed that it had prepared for itself by persecution and vice, this Gascon gentleman sate quietly in his study, with his house-door

always wide open, and a porter set there, not to keep out but to welcome visitors. Montaigne wrote of himself; but, although he seemed so different from other men, the world has seen in him a type, and has adopted his egotisms as universal truths. The *Essays* are familiar to most English readers. The translation, by the old Italian teacher Florio, was known to Shakspeare, and is often republished: readers being still found to relish its quaint turns of Elizabethan English, broken by Italian training. The later version, by Cotton, the Angler, is better in every important literary respect, and gives a clearer image of Montaigne, except in regard to quaintness.

Montaigne writes as an amateur; yet a craving for freedom of thought appears in all his seeming dilettanteism, which has been attributed to the influence of Ramus (1515-1572). This remarkable man, whose vernacular name was Pierre de la Ramée, was a born champion of liberty. He carried his protest against authority from the field of philosophy to that of religion; and, although at one time Regius Professor in the University of Paris, he died in extreme hostility to all that was established: for he was deprived of his office, and was stabbed in the streets of Paris during the night of St. Bartholomew. Ramus took the method of Socrates as his model; and declared that the way to discover truth was not so much to ascertain what Aristotle said, as to use reason in our discussions, and to follow reason to its conclusions. Because of his boldness, Ramus has had the fate of the heretic and the rebel; while Montaigne—such is the power of manner—was and still is a friend, though his originality is but secondary.

Of Montaigne's scepticism one has heard a great deal; and there has been much controversy as to its reality and extent. If it be true—as is sometimes asserted—that he was partly of English ancestry, he may have inherited, in that way, some tendency towards mental insubordination. His 'Que sçais-je?' sounds an early note of Agnosticism, and

makes him seem a precursor of Comte and Herbert Spencer. The later tendency of the French mind was less anticipated. As we know that mind now, it is more methodical, and more submissive to rules and conventions. Another speciality of Montaigne was his sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men, his readiness for sincere friendship; and the whole history of literature rings with this great truth that without sympathy there cannot easily be durable success. Juvenal and Swift are indeed still great names: but it may be doubted whether Horace and Steele are not more general favourites with posterity.

The only production which deserves to be mentioned along with Rabelais and Montaigne is the *Ménippée*, a famous satire, more talked of than read, of which an excellent account will be found in Mr. Saintsbury's book. The result of a collaboration of no less than seven professional men of Paris, it consummated the victory of Henri IV over the League, begun by the battle of Ivry. Like the *Essays and Reviews* of a later day, it consists of independent articles bound together by a common design; and it contains parody, wit, and broad caricature, with a grave and earnest peroration. The *Satyre Ménippée* gave the 'coup de Jarnac' to the age of chivalry. The following extract gives a high idea of the final article, in which a respectable member of the middle class is represented as addressing the Assembly of the States:—

O! Paris, qui n'est plus Paris, mais une spélunque de bêtes farouches, une citadelle d'Espagnols, Wallons, et Napolitains, un asile et sure retraite de voleurs, et assassinateurs; ne veux-tu jamais te ressentir de ta dignité et te ressouvenir qui tu as été, au prix de ce que vous êtes? Ne veux-tu jamais te guérir de cette frénésie qui —pour un légitime et gracieux roi—t'a engendré cinquante tyrans? Te voilà aux fers, te voilà en l'Inquisition d'Espagne, plus intolérable mille fois, et plus dure à supporter aux esprits nés libres et francs—comme sont tous les Français—que les plus cruelles morts. Tu n'as pu supporter une légère augmentation de tailles et d'offices, et quelques nouveaux édits qui ne t'importaient nullement; mais tu

endures qu'on pille tes maisons, qu'on te rançonne jusqu'au sang, qu'on emprisonne tes sénateurs, qu'on chasse et qu'on banisse tes bons citoyens et conseillers, qu'on pende et qu'on massacre tes principaux magistrats. Tu le vois, et tu l'endures! Tu ne l'endures pas seulement, mais tu l'approuves et le loues, et n'oserais et ne saurais faire autrement.

We have here a picture of great historic value, and a passage of noble sentiment in pure language.

The origin of the French drama requires a more detailed examination than we have felt necessary in the case of the early prose writings, and more than we have room for in this rapid study.

England has her Shakspeare and her Jonson; Spain her Calderon and her Lope; but the drama in France has not only produced many more masterpieces than either country, but it has taken far more permanent root. It may not be altogether fanciful to seek in the character and habits of the people for some explanation of this fact. The drama, apart from its merely spectacular form, is unique as literature. While the epic, and its modern counterpart the romance afford scope for a deeper and more analytic treatment of human affairs, the drama, with its concreteness and concentration, offers peculiar attraction for a specially intelligent but impatient class of minds. In all works of the narrative kind we have the long misfortunes of the hero, brought perhaps to a joyful termination, perhaps ending in more or less of triumph, but with cause and cure alike beyond the hero's reach. He is, if not quite passive, at least a meritorious favourite of destiny; the whole fable, more or less, showing a fund of half-satisfied optimism endeavouring to protest, and to 'justify the ways of God to man.' With the drama all this is reversed. Whether the end be technically tragic or not, the fable is conducted, so to speak, by the hero and other leading characters. Whoever may prevail in the end, it is an active struggle of the human will; no one is passive. The 'drama,' in its very name, implies *something done*.

Whatever be the reason, the French began to produce plays at an early point in the history of their literature. Mention has already been made of the *Mysteries and Moralities*, of the *Soties*, of the *Basoche*, and of *Patelin*. But the heroic drama, which is the chief distinction of the French stage down to Voltaire, begins, like other movements, with the Pleiad. Jodelle (1532-1573) was as much esteemed by his contemporaries as Ronsard. His lighter poetry has perished. But his dramatic works mark an epoch, as is shown by M. Demogeot (p. 338). Baïf had already translated the *Electra* of Sophocles and the *Hecuba* of Euripides, when Jodelle conceived the idea of treating the stories of Cleopatra and of Dido, in the Greek manner it is true, but after his own plot and in his own language. His first play, the *Cleopatre*, was performed before the King and the University at the Hôtel de Rheims in 1552, the characters being sustained by the author and his friends; and it passed, says a historian, 'for the inauguration of an era of glory.' But it was simply a court pageant in which the people took no part, whether as performers or spectators; whilst, as literature, these earlier plays have no great merit. La Harpe, who speaks contemptuously of them, gives extracts which certainly justify his attitude. But they deserve notice, as having initiated a movement of vast national importance, viz. the heroic drama in Alexandrine verse which was to be the potent organ of Corneille and Racine. A contemporary, Jean de Péruse by name, produced a *Medea* imitated from Seneca; and Grevin put on the stage a *Death of Caesar* of which the great critic speaks indulgently, and quotes with approbation the following verses:—

Alors qu'on parlera de César et de Rome,
Qu'on se souvienne aussi qu'il a été un homme—
Un Brute—le vengeur de toute cruauté—
Qui aurait d'un seul coup gagné la liberté.
Quand on dira, César fut maître de l'empire,
Qu'on sache quand et quand Brute le sut occire :

Quand on dira, César fut premier empereur,
Qu'on dise quand et quand Brute en fut le vengeur.

But he adds that in all Jodelle there is not a single passage of equal merit. Garnier (1545-1601) was another imitator of Seneca who is credited with some elevation of style. To what purpose these men wrote was not made manifest till the next century.

The earliest comic writers were (after the anonymous creator of *Patelin*) Jean de la Taille and Larivey, the latter an Italian by birth, who professedly copied the comedies of his native country. These plays, we are told by Sainte-Beuve, did not lack agreeableness. Written in octosyllabic metre, with a lively dialogue, pleasant jokes, and sallies—often happy—against priests, husbands, and ladies, these things were made to atone for sameness of plot, confusion of scene, triviality of character. In any case the comedies of that day were far better than the tragedies.

The last of the Ronsardist poets are Du Bartas and D'Aubigné, men who wasted their great powers in carrying the errors of the Pleiad movement to absurdity. Du Bartas (1544-1590) was a Gascon of vigorous mind and extensive scholarship, who wrote *La Semaine*, an account of the Creation, which attained extraordinary popularity in his own country,¹ and was at once translated by our countryman, Joshua Sylvester. It is supposed to have inspired Milton; and Dryden quotes a passage, which he said he admired in his youth, but had since found to be 'abominable fustian.' Such is the usual fate of writers who bid for immediate popularity by the help of temporary fashion. A specimen of Du Bartas at his best will be found in Mr. Saintsbury; what he could do in his other mood may be guessed from this:—

Apollon, porte-jour; Herme, guide-navire;
Mercure, échelle-nue, invente-art, aime-lyre . . .

¹ It went through thirty editions in ten years.

La guerre vient après, casse-lois, casse-mœurs,
Rase-forts, verse-sang, brûle-bois, aime-pleurs.

Agrippa d'Aubigné (1550-1630) was a less ardent disciple; his mind being of a more serious cast and habit. Besides many prose-writings he wrote a poem, of the nature of Hugo's *Légende des Siècles*, amounting to nearly ten thousand lines. This work, called *Les Tragiques donnés au Public par le larcin de Prométhée*, was published in 1616; and was a strange mixture of Hebraic and Hellenic elements, fused and kindled by Huguenot indignation. Such a style has never since been possible in France. In this case M. Demogeot forcibly observes that it is a rude envelopment which moulds the thought. Take the following sample:—

• Les cendres des brûlés sont précieuses graines
Qui, après les hivers noirs d'orage et de pleurs,
Ouvre au doux printemps d'un million de fleurs
Le baume salulaire, et sont nouvelles plantes
Au milieu des parvis de Sion florissantes.

Tant de sang, que les rois épanchent à ruisseaux,
S'exhale en douce pluie, et en fontaines d'eaux
Qui, coulantes aux pieds de ces plantes divines,
Donnent de prendre vie et de croître aux racines.

With D'Aubigné the unreformed period may be considered closed. The *grand siècle* is in sight.

We have now reached the point where all the currents begin to converge and form the mingled stream on which the greater and more stately ships were to float down to the ocean. The wild and hurling riot of Rabelais was as much affected by a Latin element, as the calm contemplative style of Montaigne was shaped by the influence of Greece; and thus the mad monk of the Isle of France has affinity with the Gascon gentleman. But these writers show something besides the classical movement imparted by Italy and the Renaissance. There is also, in both of them—however differen-

tiated by circumstances—the same schoolboy coarseness, and love of nature, which the modern French call ‘Gaulish wit’; and which, in truth, seems an original element—also visible in the English poet, Chaucer—for which he and they were by no means indebted to the classical revival.

In prose the effects of the movement were noticeable. From Comines to Montaigne, and the authors of the *Mémoires*, is barely half a century, yet the difference in style is complete; while from Joinville or Froissart to Comines the progress is hardly perceptible. It is in metrical composition that the advance is mostly seen. The strict rules that have given to French verse its delicate poise, and the rhythmic chime of its clear music, were not obligatory till they were adopted by Malherbe, and formulated by Boileau. Yet the change is felt to be approaching when we read Marot, and to be realised when we get to the Pleiad and the earlier tragedians. It is this consideration that gives to the period immediately following the Renaissance its great importance as a literary epoch.

CHAPTER III

THE AGE OF GLORY

Part I.—Poetry and Light Literature

SOON after the reconciliation of the Kings of France and of Navarre, the last Valois fell under the knife of an assassin; and French society was disturbed by another of its periodical cataclysms. The war of the League had already caused a certain amount of disorganisation, especially in Paris. The capital continued for some time to be the scene of war, famine, and disorder. In 1594 the city surrendered to the King, on which occasion the famous *Satyre Ménippée*—which had been already circulated in MS.—was published. Some account of this work was given in the last chapter. In the immediately succeeding years the country recovered itself under the genial Henri and his minister Sully, the Bismarck of those days; and general literature began to revive. It was still a time of sowing, rather than of reaping (H. Martin x. 479); but the *Astrée* of Honoré d'Urfé, published in 1608, was a great success. The popularity of this romance was due to the field being unoccupied, and to its finding a public wearied of commotion, and above all things desirous of rest. The book is a sort of amorous encyclopaedia, interrupted by episodes and dissertations; the scene is laid in an imaginary pastoral republic of the dark ages, and the characters are mere simulacrous shadows. It may be regarded as of some importance, however, as the precursor of the long-winded

prose romances of the later part of the century, which were once so fashionable.

A far more important writer was Mathurin Regnier (1573-1613), nephew of the feeble versifier Desportes. Unlike his uncle, Regnier cut himself adrift from the Ronsardist tradition; and this, no less than the sincerity of his talent, marks him out as a master. No longer contented to produce servile copies of the ancient classics, he sought rather to adopt the underlying spirit of their best models. Inspired by Horace rather than by Juvenal, Regnier produced satires and epistles, in which he used the Alexandrine—now become the French hexameter—with propriety and skill. Like Marot he acquired a permanent popularity; and Boileau did him justice in hailing him as a genuine predecessor. He was a man of gentle nature, and was generally known to his contemporaries as ‘le bon Regnier.’ He alludes to this as follows:—

Et ce surnom de *bon* me va-t-on reprochant,
D’autant que je n’ai pas l’esprit d’être méchant.

Sainte-Beuve has called him ‘the Montaigne of French poetry.’¹

The middle of the century was marked by a certain amount of revolt in France, though it did not assume the determined character of the Great Rebellion on the other side of the Channel. The literature of the *Fronde*, therefore, has nothing to show comparable to the grim polemic of Prynne or Milton, of Marvell or Wither. The *vaudeville* of the time was well described by Boileau, writing a few years later, as

Agréable indiscret qui, conduit par le chant,
Passe de bouche en bouche, et s’accroît en marchant.

And this form of ‘French liberty,’ as he calls it, takes licence not only in the way of good manners, but of morals also; being often terribly indecent.

¹ The works of Regnier were published—under the editorship of Viollet-le-Duc—by Jannet, in 1853. Though innocent, they have too much of the *esprit gaulois*, as was afterwards the case with La Fontaine.

An innocent sample or two may be allowed. Readers of the *Memoirs of Grammont* may remember the violins playing in Condé's trenches before Lérída, a Spanish town which *Monsieur le Prince* could never take. Saint-Amant wrote a song, of which the last verse ran as follows :—

Celui qui a fait la chanson
N'oserait pas dire son nom,
Car il aurait les étrivières,
Laire la,
Laire, lanlaire,
Laire la,
Laire, lanla.

For this rubbish, indeed, he was well beaten by the Prince's people ; but the refrain caught on, and when Condé laid siege to Paris the vaudevillistes took up the strain :—

Tandis que le Prince nous bloque,
Et prend bicocque sur bicocque,
Et la rivière, haut et bas,
Nous ne nous occupons qu'à faire
Au lieu de sièges, de combats
Des chansons sur laire, lanlaire.

Here we see one side of the French mind, its gay and somewhat ribald turn, the dance on the crumbling crater's brink.

But something more was required, if French was to become the universal language of literature. Clear and precise logical methods were needed ; in letters, as in politics, centralisation was imperative. The man who was to be the author of this change was a little senior to Regnier, though he worked longer. François de Malherbe was a Norman gentleman, born at Caen about 1555, who came to Paris in 1605, when Regnier's reputation was rising to its highest. He set himself up at once as a root-and-branch reformer. Attacking Pindar and Petrarch, no less than Ronsard and Desportes, he undertook to give new laws to French poetry, and to illustrate

them in his practice. In the former he was perhaps more successful than in the latter.

'Malherbe,' says La Harpe, 'was the first model of the noble style, and the creator of our lyric poetry. He has its enthusiasm, its movements, its turns. Born with taste and a good ear, he felt the influence of rhythm, and created a world of poetical constructions suited to the genius of our tongue. He taught us the species of imitative harmony which befits it, and how to use inversion with an artistic reserve. Not that his works are of a purity of style comparable to the writings of the best days of Louis XIV; it would hardly be just to require that they should be so. But all that he told us he owed to himself alone; and at the end of two centuries a number of his pieces are still quoted that are of an almost irreproachable beauty.'¹ He then gives the following fine passage on the sepulchres of kings:—

Ils sont rongés des vers :
Là se perdent ces noms de maîtres de la terre,
D'arbitres de paix, de foudres de la guerre;
Comme ils n'ont plus de sceptre, ils n'ont plus de flatteurs,
Et tombent avec eux, d'une chute commune,
Tous ceux que la fortune
Faisait leurs serviteurs.

Malherbe is less esteemed than he used to be. He is chiefly remembered for the lines to Du Périer, where a like thought occurs:—

Le pauvre en sa cabane, où le chaume le couvre,
Est sujet à ses lois;
Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend pas nos rois.

La Harpe is out of fashion now. Something will be said in the proper place as to his critical method: it is only needful

¹ *Cours*, v. 74. In making French an academic language Malherbe showed energy. 'Biffez tout Ronsard' was his motto.

to remark here that he should be consulted as to all the matters that are within his particular province. It is true that he is an academical critic, but the French of Malherbe is an academical language; and it would not be fair to apply to an author other canons than those which he himself helped to establish. *Autres temps, autres mœurs*. Malherbe had neither the elegant simplicity of Marot, nor the various eloquence of Victor Hugo. But he is entitled to a place as a *founder*; a man who—justly confident in his own ideas and principles—handed on to his successors the instrument, by the aid of which they made music in the manhood of the national life.

The best of the immediate followers of Malherbe was Honorat de Bueil, Marquis de Racan (1589–1670), who professedly adopted him as his model and guide. He was one of the original members of the *Académie*—founded 1634—and his best-known work is *Les Bergeries*. The stanzas on a country-life have been justly admired. The following lines recall Malherbe, yet possess a turn of their own:—

Le bien de la fortune est un bien périssable;
 Quand on bâtit sur elle, on bâtit sur le sable:
 Plus on est élevé, plus on court de dangers;
 Les grands pins sont en butte aux coups de la tempête,
 Et la rage des vents brise plutôt le fatte
 Des maisons de nos rois que des toits des bergers.

The Academy owes its inception to Cardinal Richelieu. Its first undertaking was the project of an authoritative French dictionary, which was originated by Vaugelas—a second-rate writer, but an authority on grammatical science.

Jean Louis Guez de Balzac (1594–1655) was another of the original Academicians, a man of the world, acquainted with Italian life and letters. He was, so to speak, the Malherbe of prose, a necessary forerunner of Pascal and Bossuet. Like Montaigne, he was a country gentleman; and he issued discourses from his château which are now forgotten, and letters

to his friends in which he studied the graces of style. He gives his ideal in the following sentences:—

L'éclat ne suppose pas toujours la solidité; et les paroles qui brillent le plus sont souvent celles qui pèsent le moins. Il y a une faiseuse de bouquets et une tourneuse de périodes, je n'ose la nommer éloquence, qui est toute peinte et toute dorée; qui semble toujours sortir d'une boîte, qui n'a soin que de s'ajuster et ne songe qu'à faire la belle; qui, par conséquent, est plus propre pour les fêtes que pour les conquêtes, et plait davantage qu'elle ne sert; quoique néanmoins il y ait des fêtes dont elle déshonorerait la solennité et des personnes à qui elle ne donnerait point de plaisir.

This seems a fair portrait of the French muse. But in such a well-ordered phraseology, egoistic and barren, one sees that style may be an end rather than a means: and the true eloquence of earnestness will be missed. Nevertheless, Balzac is recognised by native critics as 'the creator of those noble and harmonious forms in which eloquence was soon to appear. He prepared the oratorical language of the Pascals and the Bossuets' (Demogeot, p. 363). Balzac founded a prize for competition in rhetoric at the Academy, and the first laureate was Mlle de Scudéri (see p. 63).

The period we have reached was the greatest in the history of Spain. Under Charles V a general sense of Spanish power had been felt amongst the nations. Under his son Philip—a less imposing figure, but a more tenacious man—the League had, for a moment, seemed about to become an organ of the southern monarchy in France. The able ambassadors of that monarch had influence, both in English and in French politics; Raleigh was sacrificed by our James I to the vengeance of Gondomar; and, so late as the days of Richelieu, Cinq Mars was executed for conspiring with the government of his own country against that of Spain. Parisians of fashion were now 'espagnolisés.' In costume, attitude, and way of speaking, they imitated the proud warriors whom they had fought and admired. Regnier in verse, Sully

in his prose *Mémoires*, notice and ridicule these symptoms of misplaced international courtesy. Henri IV took lessons in Spanish; and his tutor—Antonio Perez—had an important share in giving a Spanish tone to the literature of France. The *estilo colto* of Gongora was introduced into France, a kind of euphuism which—like the contemporary fashion in England—was chiefly confined to the courtiers and courtly writers. At the same time a popular movement began which had a far greater future before it. In 1631 Louis XIII established the *Gazette de France*—in which he wrote a good deal; and ‘the press,’ the most potent instrument of liberalism, was thus founded in France by one of the most absolute of her rulers. The contributions of the royal editor are chiefly devoted to military news and court intelligence; but they also include political articles in defence of the system of Richelieu (Martin, xi. 356–7).

It was a barren period. Up to the troubles of the Fronde there was little—excepting the work of Malherbe, which had fallen into discredit under the Spanish influence—to show that a great age was dawning. Whatever literary culture remained at Paris was concentrated in the house of Jean de Vivonne, Marquis de Pisani, and one of the correspondents of Antonio Perez. This was the famous Hôtel de Rambouillet which, combining Italian with French principles, had considerable influence on taste, under Arthénice, (anagram of Cathérine, the Christian name of its mistress¹). The daughter of the original Marquise was governess to the Dauphin, and she presided over the Hôtel Rambouillet till the death of the poet Voiture in 1648. The association of the *Précieuses*, which this lady there initiated, renewed the work of the Pleiad; not by adding classical or foreign words

¹ La Harpe says that it was the daughter who was celebrated by the name of Arthénice. But this is a mistake: the name has no relation to the daughter's, which was Julie. Indeed, the work dedicated to her—*La Guirlande de Julie*—is mentioned by himself (vii. p. 170).

and phrases, but by giving a touch of idealism to the common French speech, refining the vocabulary, and applying it to more elevated thought. Conversation became an art; French men of letters became also men of the world; and that fusion of life and learning, of form and idea, was brought about which, when completed in the next age, led to the classic period of French literature.

Arthénice was introduced as one of the characters in the fictions of Mlle de Scudéri (d. 1701). This voluminous lady—who was preceded by d'Urfé, mentioned above, and by La Calprenède (d. 1662)—was sister to a soldier-poet whose works have been long since forgotten, and in whose name she published her novels. La Harpe says that he never read through any of this lady's books; and we can readily believe him. The Age of Louis XIV may have been an Age of Glory: it was also certainly an Age of Leisure; and it seems to have demanded stories on a scale that might alarm any one who could not expect the longevity of an antediluvian patriarch. The copy of the *Grand Cyrus* which has been consulted for the purpose of this manual, is in ten 8vo volumes, each averaging some 1100 pages: say about the size of *Chambers' Encyclopaedia*: and the contents are of a kind to render its bulk the more appalling.¹ Cold gallantry, shallow pedantry, and allegory as tedious as any in the *Roman de la Rose*, form the stuff of these fearful compositions, once the delight of a courtly society. But the patriotism of French critics has found in them also 'a certain fineness of analysis, and a touch often delicate in its ingenuity.' La Harpe ascribes the temporary success of these long-winded novels to the way in which they met the contemporary taste for personal delineation. Like the tales of the late Lord Beaconsfield, they professed to give, under altered names, highly idealised portraits of distinguished living people.

The best of them all—according to the critic who could not

¹ *Artamène; ou le Grand Cyrus*. Par M. de Scudéri. Courbé, Paris, 1653.

read any of them—was the *Cléopâtre*, not by Scudéri, but by La Calprenède. This work is even longer; but it must be admitted that the tone of all these tedious books is irreproachable. The dignity of womanhood is especially respected; and it is perhaps to these works, however unreadable in themselves, that the world has been indebted for the pleasure and profit that it has derived from the pure and high-pitched novels of Sir Walter Scott. The following sample of the *Cyrus* must suffice us here:—

[The King of Cappadocia receives a letter from the Princess Mandane during the wars in Asia Minor. Note the valour of the hero.]

Transporté de fureur, ramassant toutes ses forces, il acheva de se lever: et, regardant Artane avec une fierté qui faisoit peur, et qui avoit pourtant quelque chose de divin:—‘Viens,’ lui dit-il, ‘viens toi qui te vantes de n’être pas blessé: car, tout foible que je suis, tout couvert de plaies, et tout trempé de mon sang et de celui de nos ennemis, je ne laisserai pas de te soutenir que tu es un imposteur, et qu’il est impossible que tu aies combattu.’

The love-making is on the same lofty plane. Though at bottom love and war are founded on the lowest parts of our nature, the idea was to elevate them by the way in which they were described. Thus the ladies resent a declaration as if it were an insult; consequently the heroes conceal their passions; so that the wonder is that marriage is at last accomplished:—

La difficulté venoit de ce que Myrsile vouloit être assuré d’être aimé de cette Personne avant de l’épouser: et que Doralise ne pouvoit se résoudre de l’avouer, quoique ceux qui se mêloient de la bien connoître creussent qu’elle ne haïssoit pas Myrsile. Cependant elle parloit de celà si peu sérieusement et si brusquement (ou si négligemment) qu’on ne sçavoit quelquefois qu’en penser: et ce qu’il y eut de rare fut que Cyrus lui persuada plutôt d’épouser Myrsile qu’il ne lui persuada de lui avouer qu’elle l’aimoit.

The delicacy is somewhat exaggerated, no doubt: but it is the better extreme, and is creditable to the influence of the *Précieuses*.

Another writer of those days was De Voiture, whose works (published at Amsterdam in 1657) contain epistles of the ordinary seventeenth century kind, besides some written in imitation of Rabelaisian French, and some fugitive poetry. The prefatory memoir dwells upon the courtly gifts and graces of the author, who, however, belonged to the middle class. Voiture was the son of a wine-merchant at Amiens, and acquired the favour of the Duke of Orléans, by whom he was sent to Spain: he wrote in Spanish as well as in French, and died in 1648. His great ambition was to be a man of the world; his few writings caused him no anxiety, and were not published till after his death. Their main characteristic is wit, with agreeable turns of phrase.

Another, but very much more important frequenter of the Hôtel was Pierre Corneille (1606-1684). He was a native of Rouen, and came to Paris in 1629, where he opened his career as a writer of comedies. Some promise of a reformed *Théâtre* had been already given by Th. Viaud (1590-1626). Mairet (1604-1686), Du Ryer (1605-1658), and Rotrou (1609-1650) were writers of the Spanish school who were Corneille's contemporaries. But he has eclipsed them all; like Shakspeare in the preceding generation in England; or

velut inter ignes
Luna minores.

The *Sophonisba* of Mairet preceded *Le Cid* by no more than seven years; but in taste and style, as in dramatic force, it stands towards Corneille's work as barbarism to civilisation. It will be found that, in tracing the points of progress from *Sophonisba* to *Le Cid*, La Harpe has exposed the whole theory of the heroic drama in France, not to say the whole difference between artistic literature and realism (see his 5th volume, 1st Book, chap. ii.). The idea of *Le Cid* was taken from a Spanish dramatist; but Corneille broke away from the servility of his contemporaries. In the same manner as Regnier had treated the classicalism of the Pleiad, Corneille as-

simulated what was best in the foreign element, and made it his own. It can hardly be necessary to give extracts in proof of these assertions. In spite of the hostility of Richelieu, and of the difficulty which minds of the second order always feel towards innovating genius, the Academy was obliged to recognise the new force that was rising.

‘The vehemence of the passions,’ thus terminates the celebrated report drawn up by Chapelain on behalf of the Academy, ‘the force and delicacy of the thoughts, and that inexplicable charm which mingles in all the defects of *Le Cid*, have gained for it a high rank among French poems of its class.’

The praise is insufficient, for *Le Cid* has been regarded as a masterpiece by the public from that day to this; but it is as much as was to be expected from contemporary criticism. Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, fared no better in their time at the hands of professional critics.

From 1636, when this *chef-d'œuvre* revolutionised French taste, to 1650, when he produced *Nicomède*, Corneille continued to justify his bold ambition; we may, however, be permitted to regret that he did not follow out the line of romantic drama. Returning to the Greek and Roman forms, Corneille read his *Polyeucte* at the Hôtel Rambouillet in 1640, when he was assured by Voiture that it would not do, that it was ruined by its Christian element. Again the public reversed the verdict. As *Le Cid* had confuted the academic critics in its appeal to the stage, so did *Polyeucte* overrule the objections of the fine ladies in the same natural and appropriate tribunal. A play is, or ought to be, composed to be played; we shall find Molière triumphant in the same process. The public and posterity give the ultimate award, but only on one condition.

The personages in Corneille are types, not individuals. These, we may conclude with Sainte-Beuve, are great, generous, valiant, in their outer appearance, and in their utterances—quite unlike the personages of Shakspeare and of real life. The men are rhetoricians, even in their soliloquies. The

women are 'adorable furies,' all much alike; their love is more an affair of the head than of the heart; in fact, the author had no real knowledge of the female character. 'It is Corneille's style which forms his real excellence,' pursues this great French critic. 'With all his negligences, it seems one of the great systems of the age which owned Molière and Bossuet. The poet's touch is rude, severe, and vigorous. This style does not show much colour; it is warm rather than stormy; it turns willingly towards the abstract; and imagination yields to thought and reasoning.' Corneille carried the suffrages of the spectators by novelty and nobility suited to the taste which a number of circumstances had combined to form. Thanks to him, French literature, emancipated from the dominion of Italian and Spanish fashions, stood forth in a character of its own, ennobled by distinctive genius. Without being a great dramatist, he was a great writer, and he takes rank with Aeschylus as a permanent classic. It must also be remembered that his *Menteur* (1642) was the first work of genuine modern French comedy, soon to be so brilliantly carried on by Molière.

The most elaborate of Corneille's tragedies is *Rodogune*, which was also—perhaps for that reason—the author's favourite. Indeed, in a notice of the play which he himself wrote, he indulges in the not ungraceful egotism of genius to a somewhat remarkable degree. 'I am willing,' he says, 'to leave to every man the freedom of his opinions; but certainly none of my works possess advantages greater than what will be found here. Here are united beauty of subject, novelty of invention, force of versification, facility of expression, solidity of reasoning, warmth of passion, the tenderness of love and friendship, and such a treatment of this happy assemblage that it rises from act to act.' Allowance being made, as above, for the special conditions of the place and time, these praises are not undeserved. The lines that follow may serve to give a notion of the energetic style:—

[It is an ambitious woman that is speaking.]

Trône ! à t'abandonner je ne puis consentir ;
Par un coup de tonnerre il vaut mieux en sortir,
Il vaut mieux mériter le sort le plus étrange.
Tombe sur moi le ciel, pourvu que je me venge !
J'en recevrai le coup d'un visage remis ;
Il est doux de périr après ses ennemis.

In the very different direction of comedy Corneille showed a similar ability. In none of his work shall we find the subtle observation or mimetic skill of Molière or Shakspeare. But the *Menteur* is still performed in France ; and many persons in England must have seen Foote's version, in which the principal part was sometimes taken by the late Charles Matthews. Corneille asserted that the real author of the fable was a Spanish dramatist named Alarcon, although the work which formed Corneille's source of inspiration has been ascribed to the prolific and versatile Lope de Vega. In Corneille's version there is little attempt at fine writing, but the piece is lively, and the unities—without being followed to servility—are not grossly outraged. The slight and apparently intractable plot is brought to a happy and not incredible termination.

What was wanting to the French theatre, as it was left by Corneille, was to be at least partly supplied by an author only a few years his junior. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière (1622-1673) was not a great rhetorician, or an ambitious or conscious innovator. But he was an actor, a manager, and, above all, an observer ; and it may be doubted whether Shakspeare himself ever equalled him in his own peculiar line of comedy. Deeper the Englishman may be, more tender, more *electric* ; but for pure wit, knowledge of life, and a sort of benevolent pity, not untouched by mild contempt, Molière has perhaps had no superior among those who have written for the stage. As La Harpe puts it, Molière is of all writers the one who has most observed man, without making a parade of his observation ; and he produces the effect of knowing mankind by instinct rather than that of having gained his

knowledge by study. In reading his works with attention, one is not so much astonished at the author, as at what has been learned of oneself. There is, doubtless, a difference between some of the minor plays and others of a higher class. The earlier pieces, *L'Etourdi* and the *Dépit*, are inferior in point of invention and character-drawing; while some of the lighter pieces—such as *M. de Pourceaugnac*, *Les Fourberies*, and *Le Médecin malgré lui*—are farcical and coarse. But we must bear in mind that Molière, like Shakspeare, wrote for the immediate purposes of the hour; and that even then the French stage had to appeal to a mixed multitude whose first want was to be amused. Of those works we need say no more. In the *Misanthrope*, *L'Avare*, the *École des Femmes*, and, above all, in *Tartufe*, he has reached—sometimes in style, and always in purely dramatic effect—a place among the very highest.

When Molière was at the zenith of his fame,¹ he received a visit from a young writer who brought him a play. Molière read it, showed how it would not do, gave his visitor some money, and advised him to begin again. That young writer was Racine (1639-1699), a dramatist who completed the work of Corneille and Molière, by adding the most exquisite finish and polish, and making the French stage a model to the civilised world. Following on the lines of Shakspeare, Voltaire and Hugo afterwards led the drama of their country into other and more ambitious developments. But so far as a drama, adopting the unities, trammelled by rhyme, and aiming at artificial perfection could go, so far Racine out-distanced all comparison. Molière may have more wit and observation, Corneille more elevation of style; but—always by French standards—Racine is the only one who, in his best work, is quite *perfect*. It is not intended by this to assert that there is not another—perhaps for English spectators a

¹ Molière was never a member of the Academy; but after his death his bust was put up there with this inscription:—*Rien ne manque à sa gloire, il manquait à la nôtre.*

more instructive—drama; but Racine is certainly a better artist than any one else in his own line. If he does not idealise life, he makes the ideal live.

For purposes of study Racine may be divided into three classes. His plays from Greek subjects have many departures from the model of Sophocles. Especially in regard to the passion of *love*, we notice how the change of civilisation had to operate. The Greeks of old were civilised, but it was in a different way from ourselves, the heirs of chivalry. With them ladies occupied the background, as in Eastern life is still the custom. With the French of Racine's time the influence of educated women had long been growing; and, at least since the reign of Francis I, they had taken a part by the side of the more active sex. For the treatment of love as for other things, Racine had models in the tragedies of Corneille; and his first efforts—*Les Frères ennemis* and *Alexandre*—were little more than plays on Greek stories, composed in direct imitation of his predecessor. It was in *Andromaque* (1667) that he first used his own wings, and showed of what new exploits he was capable. To use the phrase of La Harpe, *Le Cid* had made the first epoch of the French heroic drama, and the epoch was brilliant; but *Le Cid* had owed much to its Spanish original. *Andromaque* marked a second epoch, and its glories were Racine's alone. Profiting by the slender hints of Homer and of Virgil, the modern writer, while preserving as much as possible the Greek purity of form, added to it wealth of colour; and the sentiments of pity and of sympathetic alarm were allied with those of admiration and terror. Above all we have now the drama. Instead of puppets moved by the inexorable destinies, we see human beings directed by the force of their own feelings. Racine's power of creative imitation reached its height in *Phèdre* (1677), where, by transferring to the passionate, perfidious wife the interest which Euripides had concentrated in the innocent son of Theseus, he shifted the whole bearing of the fable. Those who are old enough to have seen the illus-

trious Rachel in the title part of this piece can best understand the effect of this original conception.

The second class of Racine's tragedies is scarcely less important. In *Britannicus* (1669) he produced what, as a mere poem, is considered by French critics his finest production. Racine took from Tacitus the situation best suited to his genius—the exhibition of a heart once human, perverted to monstrosity by absolute power. It is related by La Harpe that the public was at first disappointed that Nero seemed *trop bon*,—too amiable in his manners and speech; they missed the strong language of Corneille. But the same profound critic, tracing the development of Nero's character, points out that his depravity is shown in action rather than in words; while even in words he shows, if not the rant of a conventional tyrant, the cool atrocity of a royal monster. 'Such,' cries La Harpe, 'must have been Charles IX.' *Mithridate* (1673) is considered the crowning work of Racine in historical drama, giving the sublimity of *unity* in place of a sublimity of fragmentary outbursts.

A few extracts will justify what has been said in praise of *Andromaque*, and give some faint notion of its extraordinary beauty as artificial dramatic poetry. It must be remembered that Andromache, the heroine, is the widow of Hector and the captive of Pyrrhus, Prince of Epirus, the son of Achilles. The latter is pledged to Hermione, but resolves to violate his pledge and marry his captive. Hermione's love and pride are both so deeply offended that she feels nerved to any vengeance; and in her own discarded suitor, Orestes, she finds a ready instrument. In the fourth act Hermione exhausts every art of rhetoric and a sort of heroic coquetry in cajoling him to murder Pyrrhus: e.g. (he hesitates)—

J'ai voulu vous donner les moyens de me plaire,
Rendre Oreste content: mais enfin je vois bien
Qu'il veut toujours se plaindre et ne mériter rien.
Partez; allez ailleurs vanter votre constance;
Et me laissez ici le soin de ma vengeance;

De mes lâches bontés mon courage est confus,
Et c'est trop, en un jour, essayer de refus;

she declares her determination to kill the traitor with her own hand.

And yet, when Pyrrhus, attempting to make his peace with her, suggests that, after all, she could hardly have loved him so much as to mind giving him up, she answers with the celebrated apostrophe beginning with these beautiful lines:—

Je ne t'ai point aimé! Cruel, qu'ai-je donc fait?
J'ai dédaigné pour toi les vœux de tous nos princes;
Je t'ai cherché moi-même au fond de tes provinces;

J'ai cru que, tôt ou tard, à ton devoir rendu,
Tu me rapporterais un cœur qui m'était dû,
Je t'aimais inconstant: qu'aurais-je fait fidèle?
Et, même en ce moment, où ta bouche cruelle
Vient si tranquillement m'annoncer le trépas,
Ingrat! je doute encor si je ne t'aime pas.

But he leaves the tender fury and hastens to his bride; at the altar he is stabbed by Orestes. The latter then comes in a mixed mood of shame and hope to claim the love purchased by a crime of which he himself has described the full heinousness. And the reward is—to be overwhelmed with reproach and cast away like the bloody tool he is.

Va [says Hermione] faire chez les Grecs admirer ta fureur:
Va; je la désavoue, et tu me fais horreur.
Barbare! qu'a tu fait? Avec quelle furie
As tu tranché le cours d'une si belle vie?

Pourquoi l'assassiner? Qu'a-t-il fait? A quel titre?
Qui te l'a dit?

And, when the miserable criminal cries out upon this injustice, how womanlike she turns on him:—

Ah! fallait-il en croire une amante insensée?
Ne devais-tu pas lire au fond de ma pensée?

Et ne voyais-tu pas, dans mes emportements,
Que mon cœur démentait ma bouche à tous moments?
Quand je l'aurais voulu, fallait-il y souscrire?
N'as tu pas dû cent fois te le faire redire?
Toi-même, avant le coup, me venir consulter?
Y revenir encore, ou plutôt m'éviter?
Que ne me laissais-tu le soin de ma vengeance?
Qui t'amène en des lieux où l'on fuit ta présence?

This may seem artificial to the countrymen of Shakspeare with his 'woodnotes wild,' but surely it is very true to Nature; and it might not be easy to find any passage in our own dramatist where the inconsistencies and injustices of woman's heart are more subtly perceived, or rendered in more passionate phrase.

After twelve years of silence the muse of Racine took her third and final flight. In 1684 the French King, Louis XIV, then approaching the period of old age, married Mme de Maintenon. Like the great Turenne, and many others in those days of royal ascendancy, this lady, having been bred a Protestant, had adopted the religion of the monarch, and now exhibited all the usual fervour of a convert. In this spirit of zeal she founded, at St. Cyr, a school for the education of poor girls of noble birth. Devotion was now the fashionable mania; and Racine was no more able to resist the current than his contemporary in England, John Dryden. He accordingly undertook to produce a religious drama for the entertainment of *ces demoiselles*; and the result was *Esther*, performed at the new seminary in 1689, the pupils sustaining the parts. The work was rendered remarkable by the number of its allusions to passing events, the fall of La Montespan, the rise of her rival, the revocation of the great Henry's act of toleration, the Edict of Nantes. Such things may appear breaches of literary taste, especially if we bear in mind the object for which the piece was written; but *Esther* shows little inferiority in workmanship to the author's earlier and more secular productions. - He now for the first time intro-

duced a chorus, in the old Greek manner; and some of the songs assigned to this chorus are among the few really poetic efforts of French sacred poetry. From Deschamps to Béranger there has been no want of good lyric work; but the genius of the language does not seem very well fitted for hymns. We shall presently see a sample of this somewhat hollow art in J. B. Rousseau.

Next year *Athalie* appeared, the second of Racine's 'sacred' dramas, and the last product of his pen. It shows no failure in skill or power, but it had no immediate success. The author's death, which soon followed, has been ascribed to chagrin at this disappointment; but the actual cause of his death is stated by the poet's son to have been a surgical operation undertaken in the hope of healing an abscess of the liver.¹

Racine, like his predecessor, wrote one comedy, *Les Plaideurs*. It is not nearly so serious a production as the *Menteur*, being more farcical, both in conception and in style; but few works so short have produced so many household words. As the countryman said of *Hamlet*, it is 'full of quotations.' In the curious preface to this work Racine professes to have imitated the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, but takes credit to himself for having steered clear of coarseness and buffoonery. Perhaps the 'tears' of the orphans, in the last act, may to modern taste appear a little to detract from this claim.

No writers in other fields of poetry, in this age, are so important as these.

Space will only permit us to name two: Boileau, and La Fontaine.

Boileau Despréaux (1636-1711) was the son of a Parisian lawyer and bred to the law. Early in life he embraced a literary career, and became the friend and associate of Molière, Racine, and La Fontaine. After some trouble with

¹ Memoir prefixed to the collected works. Paris, 1838.

Chapelain—the same critic whom we saw employed by the Academy to report upon *Le Cid*—Boileau obtained the notice of Louis XIV by his *Satires*, published in 1665. His *Art Poétique* appeared in 1674, and was at once accepted as the final award of criticism on the principles of French poetry, and on the poets whom the writer reviewed. The voice of posterity has, to a great extent, confirmed the judgment. We must not expect in any author a taste which is altogether out of harmony with his age. Boileau no more appreciated mediæval poetry than Pope appreciated Chaucer. It must be confessed that his notices of Villon and Marot are somewhat patronising: nevertheless, what he has said of them—as of Ronsard—is, so far as it goes, discriminative and acute. He is more just to Malherbe, of whose work indeed he was the continuator. It is probable that Racine, who was his friend, acquired from Boileau some of the taste which led to the perfection of style to which he attained. Our own Pope was also doubtless indebted to Boileau for the piquant finish of his versification; and Pope's best work, the *Rape of the Lock*, was an almost avowed imitation of the *Lutrin* of Boileau, a mock-heroic on the attempt of some priests to remove a broken lectern from a neglected corner to its proper place in the church they served. The *Essay on Criticism* in like manner arose out of the *Art Poétique*.

The fashion has changed, and the school of Boileau is forsaken. Nevertheless, to him belongs the credit of having formed the taste of two centuries, and of having established a style in French poetry, from which none but the very boldest of his successors have ventured to deviate very widely, and even those, perhaps, at their peril. The last days of this great writer were clouded by the morose devotionism that marked the end of the reign of Louis XIV; and he died as a recluse, after producing a work in which his correctness without his old fire, left no charm behind.

If Pope reminds us of Boileau, there is no contemporary English poet who can for a moment be compared to La

Fontaine. Gray and Thomson resemble him in a kind of harmless and indolent complacency, Prior in power of turning a scandalous tale. But La Fontaine, alone among all the writers of that day, is marked by the complete assimilation of what was most graceful in the older French writers, polished by study of the Classics and the Italian authors, inspired by a love of the open air, and a sincere observation of Nature. Throughout his long life (1621-1695) he maintained his simplicity, his disinterestedness, and loyalty to his Muse. The work by which La Fontaine is best known to-day will be found in his *Fables*, of which no more need be said than that they appeared in three series; the first six books in 1668, the next five in 1678-9, and the twelfth and last in 1694. La Harpe has given a just description of these charming productions, and has shown the true originality and merit of the author:—

‘He does not so much compose as converse; if he relates anything it is because he has seen it. It is always his real soul that is speaking to you, that opens itself and is betrayed. He always seems to be telling you a secret, and to be under the necessity of doing so. Ideas, reflections, feelings, all escapes him, all is the impulse of the moment.’ He is a child, with the powers of a man. This *naïveté* is the cause at once of his chief merit, and of his principal defect. Some of his writings are shocking to modern readers. It is not so much that he is immoral as that he is non-moral. But his old nurse said, when he was dying, *Le bon Dieu n'aura jamais le courage de le damner*; and certainly he has managed to elude the condemnation of posterity—which is as far as we can look. He died with the sacraments of the Church, and his funeral charges were defrayed out of a present sent him by the Heir-Apparent—a child of ten to a child of eighty.

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF GLORY

Part II. — Prose

AFTER this brief treatment of the chief poetical products of the great French age, we must devote the remaining portion of our study to a consideration, on the same small scale, of its prose—an art in which perfection always seems to come later than in verse.

The first in time, and in some senses the greatest, prose-writer of that age was Descartes (1596–1650). Though modern science has not confirmed all his anticipations; though his infinitesimal calculus may have been replaced by Leibnitz, and his *vortices* abolished by Newton; yet his *Discours de la méthode* has been thought to have established a *novum organon* where our Verulam had failed, and laid the foundation of all future philosophy. This—the only one of his works which was originally written in French—was published in 1637, and is regarded by French critics as one of the first masterpieces of their prose. No longer, as in Montaigne, do we find a personal style, a gracefully-fantastic amalgam of learned and vernacular idioms; no longer, as in Balzac, a framework of eloquence hollow and sterile: language familiar to all educated persons is appropriated to the service of one, and becomes the appropriate vehicle of original thought. We

may cite from the *Discours* the following sentences, in which Descartes at once explains his method of expression, and furnishes it with apt illustrations :—

Ceux qui ont le raisonnement le plus fort et qui digèrent le mieux leurs pensées—à fin de les rendre claires et intelligibles—peuvent toujours le mieux persuader ce qu'ils proposent, encore qu'ils ne parlissent que bas-breton et qu'ils n'eussent jamais appris la rhétorique.

That straightforward manly eloquence did for French prose what *Le Cid* was to do for poetry. From that time no other style was recognised.

The rest of Descartes' work was originally composed in Latin; and, for that reason, and because it is mainly of a philosophical character, we need not take it into consideration from our present point of view, which is that of French literature regarded as an art. But what has been already said is due to the man who, discarding all literary models, originated a fine literary instrument, by mere force of sincerity and the passionate pursuit of truth. The *Discours* is a philosophic autobiography, in which the author, with modest firmness, explains the progress of his own intellect, lays down the principles which guided his mental operations, and unfolds the truths which he conceives himself to have ascertained. It has been lately reproduced in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1888).

If Descartes was the founder of French philosophy, we are not to suppose that his work was accomplished without opposition. It may at first sight be a matter of surprise that so wise and conservative a thinker should have met with his fiercest opponent in the devout champion of Port-Royal. Gassendi, the famous mathematician, had, it is true, opposed Descartes' extreme idealism; but his opposition was only on materialist grounds, and from the materialist point of view; so that the controversy was merely one between philosophers. But the spiritualistic and theologic line of attack was taken

by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662); and the quarrel interested every one who felt conscious of a soul. Descartes had sought in that very consciousness a proof of the existence of an all-perfect God. Pascal, jealous of the claims of Christianity, declared—somewhat in the spirit shown in our own day by a great Catholic writer¹—that the reason of man could furnish no such proof. We do not attempt to pronounce judgment in such a controversy.

But the permanent place in French literature which Pascal reached was not due to his philosophy or to his science. It was the apparently trivial, or in any case simple, question whether certain teaching was or was not contained in a certain theological treatise, that drew forth the earliest and most exquisite performance of its kind in French literary history. Devoted to good models as is the genius of our brilliant neighbours, it may be doubted if they have ever succeeded in reproducing the mixture of grave irony and dignified contempt which, with a style that is the very acme of curious felicity, make up the delicious, the irresistible *Lettres à un provincial* (1656). Addressed in reality to the public, and therefore largely to women, these 'Letters' appealed to common sense in the name of morality and of religion. 'Brevity, clearness, an elegance then unknown, a biting, natural pleasantry, words which are not to be forgotten, all combined to win a popular success. Pascal, before Molière, anticipates true comedy. He introduces on the scene various actors, an impartial person who receives all the confidences of anger and excitement, sincere partizans, false partizans (more ardent than the others), conciliators in good faith universally repulsed, hypocrites everywhere welcomed: a veritable comedy of manners.'²

In the three first of these famous chapters Pascal is on a thorny path, and deals with the theological subject of *grace*, as to which he has to oppose a whole school of divines. It

¹ *vide* Newman's *Apologia*.

² Villemain.

is not until we reach the fourth letter that we get upon ground where the interest is generalised, while the antagonists become special. He here attacks what was then thought to be the moral casuistry of the Society of Jesus; and from that moment all readers are at his command. It is not our province to consider how far Pascal was just to the Jesuits: all that we have to notice is the power of his literary art. The doctrine of Probabilism, first propounded by Molina in the 16th century, rests upon a theory diametrically opposed to that of Kant; for it allows of no 'categorical imperative.' In the hands of the Jesuits it was supposed to tend to moral laxity; and, when Pascal gave expression to the suspicions of the public by his accomplished pen, the cause of the Casuists was lost. His *Pensées* are fragments of a philosophical treatise that was never completed: pessimism, doubt, morbid religious earnestness, make up a series of fragments of which it has been said that they seem written with the blood of the author's heart. 'It is by the soul,' says Victor Cousin, 'that Pascal is great, whether as man or as author. The style which reflects that soul has all its gifts; subtlety, bitter irony, burning imagination, austere reason, at the same time trouble and a chaste discretion. The style, like the soul, is of an incomparable beauty.' It is not a fair reproach against Pascal that fragmentary work of this sort, never intended for publication, reveals the weak side of apologetic metaphysics. In endeavouring to show the necessity of Revelation, he was led to combat the supposed proofs of natural theology; and the hints which he threw upon paper in so doing, though only intended for his own guidance, incurred the criticism of Voltaire, and are perhaps still more imperilled in face of the deeper criticism of a later age of thought and science. But it is merely as literature that we are bound to consider the *Pensées*; and as such they will be pronounced not unworthy of the author of the *Provincial Letters*.

If Pascal attacked the theology of Descartes on orthodox grounds, it was adopted and expounded by an equally

orthodox writer, but one of a more sane and genial character. Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon¹ (1651-1715) was a scion of noble family in Périgord, destined from childhood to the clerical profession. Disappointed in his endeavour to visit Greece and the Levant, he was called to Paris and put in charge of a congregation of female converts from Calvinism, soon becoming a distinguished figure in the society of the capital. From 1678 till about ten years later, Fénelon employed himself in study and composition, writing *Dialogues on Eloquence*, and, above all, a *Traité sur l'existence de Dieu*. In this latter he shows a prescience of the dangers of the Pascalian position, and proceeds to argue that the existence of God can be ascertained, not only by the metaphysical reasoning of Descartes, but even by the everyday observation of Nature. With mild persuasiveness and that bland warmth which he had learned from his experience among the 'nouvelles Catholiques,' he gently and gradually prepares his readers for the metaphysical demonstration. Thus, in the first part of Fénelon's treatise he follows Cicero, and in the second he follows Descartes. In all this, as need hardly be observed, there was no tendency to minimise the office of Revelation; indeed a treatise on Religion soon afterwards proceeded from the same persuasive pen. About this time also, Fénelon published a treatise on female education, which he showed to be the true basis of social amelioration. In 1686 he accepted another mission, and three years later was appointed tutor to the young Duke of Burgundy, grandson of the King, and heir to the throne.

Tu Marcellus eris! Had this boy attained manhood, how much of history might have been changed! The mind of Fénelon was henceforth chiefly shown in the writings prepared for the instruction of his pupil. In these (*Fables*, *Dialogues*, *Aventures de Télémaque*) a continuous effort is seen.

¹ La Harpe puts an acute accent on each of the first two syllables of the name. I have not observed this spelling in any other French writer.

Despotism is denounced; the reign of law is proclaimed; peace and patriotism are inculcated. 'Celui qui gouverne doit être le plus obéissant à la loi: *la personne détachée de la loi n'est rien.*' *Télémaque* is, of all Fénelon's works, the one most generally known and admired. We have seen how, at the beginning of active life, he had aspired to visit Greece. In a letter written at the time he told his correspondent of his blended emotions as poet and as Christian:—

La Grèce entière s'ouvre à moi . . . Je me sens transporté dans ces beaux lieux, et parmi ces ruines précieuses, pour y recueillir, avec les plus curieux monuments, l'esprit même de l'antiquité. Je cherche cet aréopage où Saint Paul annonça aux sages du monde le Dieu inconnu. Mais le profane vient après le sacré; Et je ne dédaigne pas de descendre au Pirée, où Socrate fit le plan de sa République. Je monté au double sommet du Parnasse; je cueille les lauriers de Delphes et je goûte les délices de Tempé.

Out of such enthusiasm masterpieces are born. Malherbe and Boileau, Corneille, Racine himself, had been content to draw most of their inspiration from Latin writers—Horace, Virgil, Seneca. Fénelon appreciated and appropriated Greek writings, and those of the best class. Before beginning *Télémaque* he translated six books of the *Odyssey*, so as to saturate himself with the style.

Not only is the tone caught, but the conduct of the story and the delineation of the characters are alike classic, original, and brilliant. To instruct a young prince, Fénelon describes the adventures of a prince a little older. Mentor, in correcting the errors of youth, raises and purifies the hero's nature; precept and example were presented to the illustrious pupil on the same pages. 'It is the mixture of elevation and simplicity,' says Villemain, 'of force and submission, which makes up, perhaps, the most interesting and loveable character that was ever invented by the epic muse.'

If Fénelon touches the poet's lyre with one hand, he lays the other on the cushion of the pulpit. We have seen that

he began his literary career by writing on eloquence. It was the theory of this treatise that written sermons were not true oratory, which was only to be found flowing hot from the furnace of the soul. Some of his clerical contemporaries, however, thought differently. Bossuet (1627-1704) has been called the soul of the age. From the time when he first preached before Louis in the Louvre Chapel (1661) to the period of his successful contest with Fénelon (1697), Bossuet accompanied the King as his counsellor, his organ, almost his conscience. More Hebraic than Greek, he seemed inspired by the austere grandeur of the Old Testament Prophets. But his sermons are literature. Later in life, Bossuet adopted the method approved by Fénelon, and trusted, like an ancient orator, to the impulse of the moment for the development of a general conception. Only in his funeral orations does he seem to have preserved the habit of written preparation; and it is to this circumstance that we owe the grand series of this modernised *Macabre*, this solemn pomp and procession of Death. Another, and more valuable, employment of Bossuet's great eloquence and skill was the well-known *Histoire Universelle*, completed in 1679, as the author finished also the education of the Heir-Apparent (the father of Fénelon's pupil).

A preacher still more celebrated at that time—though one who has left much less impression on posterity—was Bourdaloue. Bossuet, in the eyes of his contemporaries, was not so much a preacher as a Father of the Church: he stood too high for human praise. As a polemic and ecclesiastical statesman he enjoyed supreme authority in France; and his *Exposition de la doctrine catholique* was adopted by the French clergy in 1682 as the manifesto of the Gallican Church against Ultramontane claims. In his controversy with Fénelon, on the system of the Quietists, he extorted the support of the Pope whose authority he had professed to weaken or deny. His gentle but courageous antagonist surrendered to the Papal award; but the voice of the public,

from then to now, has generally condemned Bossuet: on a comparison of the written arguments of each the Swan of Cambrai is held to have got the better of the Eagle of Meaux.

Bourdaloue (1632-1704) was more strictly a literary divine. He was educated by the Jesuits, and entered the Order in his seventeenth year. But, instead of being, like most of his brethren, an insinuating man of the world, he quickly showed that a Jesuit could be more severe and vigorous than any preacher of equal popularity. The power of his logic assumed the character of creative force. It is creditable to the times that such a preacher was so honoured. He was chosen to preach before the King in ten successive Lents; and, in spite of an apostolic sincerity which allowed no compromise with sin, his sermons were admired by a luxurious Court. But he wanted the seductive charm of Fénelon, and the prophet-like sublimity of Bossuet. 'I know of no preacher,' said the former, 'who is more capable of demonstration, and less fit to touch or to *persuade*.' All his sermons were first committed to writing, then learned by heart, and—to a great extent at least—delivered from memory.

The fourth of these great pulpit orators was Massillon (1663-1742), an Oratorian, who had the worldly gifts which were lacking in the stern, uncompromising Jesuit Bourdaloue. Like him however in this respect, Massillon recited his written compositions in the pulpit; but he did not address himself so much to the intellect as to the feelings. His eloquence was more calculated to melt, than to carry away his hearers; and he showed them the error of their ways, without losing their attachment. His diction is always easy, pure, and harmonious, produced without any appearance of effort. We have lost sight of Bossuet as the Ambassador of Heaven, showing his credentials in the Bible and the texts of the Fathers: with Massillon we encounter moral philosophy and the science of the heart. 'C'est en me sondant moi-même,' he said, 'que j'ai appris à tracer ces peintures.' Massillon

survived the Age of Glory and lived to pronounce over the tomb of Louis the well-known oration beginning with the words:—'Dieu seul est grand, mes frères!'

The character that we have found in Massillon showed still more strongly in the secular prose-writers of the time.

Three of these are still remembered.

The long life of Marcatel de St. Denis, Lord of Saint-Evre-mont (1613-1703), covers the time from Malherbe to Boileau. As a young man he was engaged in the *Fronde*—a war as much of pens as of swords. In his extreme old age he might have been seen by Voltaire. La Harpe condemns his poetry; which, nevertheless, is still read as society-verse: of his prose the same critic acknowledges that it is delicate and ingenious; the work of a courtier and a man of the world.

La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) is another lordly writer, who has enjoyed a still greater and more enduring popularity. His celebrated *Maxims* are models of concise and concentrated expression, though marred throughout by a radical flaw in conception. Living at Court in a peculiarly egoistic epoch, he believed men to be incapable of generous feeling. Hence, all his epigrams in prose are exclusively applicable to a society of egoists. The author throughout confuses self-interest, which is inherent in human nature, with self-love, which is humanity's besetting but remediable sin. La Harpe has devoted some of his most brilliant pages to the examination of a number of the typical passages in which this blemish vitiates the whole thought.

A far more reasonable commentator on morals and manners was La Bruyère (1639-1696). In his *Caractères*—originated by the Greek work of Theophrastus—this author paints his time with at least equal keenness, but with far more justice and observation. La Harpe, while combating what he considers his errors, has done justice to the great merits of this author. In the space of a few lines he puts his characters on the stage in twenty different ways; in a page he exhausts the ridiculousness of a fool, the vices of a villain,

the history of a passion, or the lines of a moral resemblance. His phrases are original, his terms are strong and lively; his conciseness is picturesque, and his rapidity luminous. A writer of comedies will find in him abundance of instruction: yet after reading him you feel almost prouder of your own wit than of the author's.

One of the best and latest of the amateur writers of this fertile period was a foreigner. Count Anthony Hamilton (1646-1720) was one of the cavaliers who followed James II to France, where he amused his latter days by writing tales which have won the highest praise from French critics. Inspired by Galland's inaccurate but spirited version of the *Arabian Nights*, Hamilton produced, for the amusement of the ladies of his circle, tales of which *Fleur d'Épine* is the most successful. La Harpe notices with generous warmth the gaiety, wit, and grace of this production of the Scottish cavalier. But it is especially in the celebrated *Memoirs* of his brother-in-law, Count Grammont, that Hamilton claims the attention of posterity. The book is too well-known to require much description. La Harpe has ascribed some of its indefinable charm to the influence of Voiture. But Voiture is forgotten, while *Grammont* is still a favourite with all. The art of uttering trifles so as to make them seem important has never been carried farther. These memoirs, with their assumed tone of seriousness and elegant *persiflage*, which never trenches on vulgarity, gives us the most credible picture of the English Court in the days of Buckingham and Rochester. It is something midway between satire and history.

A more pretentious historian was the Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755), the chronicler of the last days of the Age of Glory. The *Memoirs* left by this nobleman were first published in 1829; but their tone is that of their subject. The writer was a 'grand seigneur,' in whose eyes a 'duc et pair' was something, in its way, as divine as a king himself could be. When Louis XIV was forced by combined Europe to

consent to the complete separation of the Spanish and French royalties, Saint-Simon tells us that he sate up all night over a minute, in which he volunteered to instruct the *Grand Monarque* that an organic act of this sort could only be valid if registered by himself and his brother-peers. He was, however, a Jansenist, and in his religious and political character alike opposed to the spirit of his country and disposed to be watchful and critical towards the Crown. Bishops who are not of good family, but have risen by their abilities and learning, are for him 'purple pedagogues,' persons 'not born.' With one hand he strikes at the vicious hypocrisy of the Court, with the other at the impertinent scruples of grammar. His book describes the last years of Louis XIV, but fails us as authority for the Regency—a period which produced very little history, or any other kind of literature. Saint-Simon is a mixture of Tacitus and Polonius. His memoirs end with the establishment of the Regency, when the author once more unsuccessfully attempted to have the peers regarded as the source of power.

Finally, what shall we say of the charming Madame de Sévigné, virtuous yet charitable; mixing pagan stoicism with Christian faith; admiring the king, yet faithful to his victim Fouquet; the most careless of writers, yet the most graceful; whose letters, addressed to a daughter, have been opened and read by the world? Born in Burgundy, in 1627, Marie de Chantal was married early to the Marquis de Sévigné, and became a widow at the age of twenty-five, with the care of one son and one daughter. She knew the world, she knew the Court, she knew the country. Having had an excellent education she was able to read Tasso and Virgil in their originals; and the goodness of her heart contributing to these accomplishments enabled her to amuse the rural dulness of her daughter's life with an incomparable series of letters. They unite, says a French critic, all the qualities of the language; 'it is the French style *par excellence*, full of the Gaulish savour of the past age, and purified by all the

elegances of a select society.' Mme de Sévigné died in 1696.

The end of the Great Age draws near. Like telegraph-cables which pass under the ocean to convey messages from one continent to another, the concealed incredulities of the time of Montaigne had traversed invisibly the pomposities and fanaticisms of the seventeenth century, to speak to the coming Age of Reason.¹ Already Spinoza had done away with the authority of Revelation, to found on the vacant space a vast fabric of transcendental pantheism. Bayle (1647-1706), while professing to respect established beliefs, had laid the foundations of Positivism, and became a prelude to the Encyclopaedists by his sceptical but chaotic *Dictionary*. Ninon de l'Enclos, and the profligate Vendôme, had collected in their *salons* the materials of a new Rambouillet, where free-thought was an apology for free-living. The higher poetry was flying from an earth where she was no longer welcome. Prose, long compressed by the dignity and the austerity of the Court, was to assume new forms, and to stand forth as a new power. The end of the reign of Louis XIV was also the end of a literary epoch.

¹ *vide* Barbier's remarks on the supposed miracles at the tomb of Paris, quoted by Martin (xv. 471). The light of scepticism throws the shadow of superstition.

CHAPTER V

THE AGE OF REASON

Part I

WHAT we have called the Age of Reason was also the age of cynicism and destruction. Academic tradition still held sway over the form of Literature, but the spirit had well-nigh evaporated. The Regent d'Orléans was a man of equal ability and moral laxity. His minister, Cardinal Dubois, was the fit servant of such a master. Material enjoyment was the order of the day, tempered by a policy of concession to English political interests and a perpetual lack of pence, which led to the adoption of the wildest expedients. No great writer sheds glory on the beginning of the eighteenth century in France; one second-rate tragedian and two writers of novels, with one skilful versificator and a moralist, are all the men of letters whose works have come down to us from that distressing period, which has been aptly called by Michelet 'une halte dans la boue.'

Crébillon, the elder (1674-1762), produced during his long life many of those so-called classical dramas, in which Greek names were given to French puppets, and the sentiments of an insincere conventionalism were mouthed through the mask of Racine and Corneille. Fréron pretended to compare him with Voltaire as a tragedian; but La Harpe has shown by long extracts from his plays how absurd the comparison was. Crébillon's first drama, *Idoménée*, was produced in 1704, and was the worst of its kind. Voltaire himself said of another

and better work of Crébillon's: 'The style is worthy of the story; most of the lines are obscure, and often not good French.' Occasionally there are passages of great energy in these dramas; but Crébillon had not enough salt to keep him from decay: his works have ceased to be reprinted, nor do any of his plays seem to be now performed.

Le Sage (1668-1747) also wrote for the stage, and his comedy of *Turcaret* (an attack upon the revenue officers of the day) was produced in 1709, with more than a *succès d'occasion*. But it is in his novels—*Le Diable Boiteux* and, especially, *Gil Blas*—that his true capacity is seen. The former is taken, partly, from Guevara, a contemporary Spanish author, to whom Le Sage acknowledged his obligations in a graceful dedication. *Gil Blas* is more entirely original, though the scene is laid in the same country; and has been truly said to be one of the few romances which are read, and re-read, always with pleasure. The unheroic hero, with his commonplace character and freedom from all extremes, whether of vice or of virtue, is so just a type of average mankind that all readers follow his adventures with a kind of personal interest. The narrative is rapid; the style is frank, natural, and true; French good nature is happily blended with the *picaresque* life of Spain, and with the universal weakness of the human heart. The admiration for Le Sage by Sir Walter Scott, the great master of fictitious narrative than whom no better judge of the art ever existed, was so express as to furnish unequivocal testimony to the French author's great and abiding excellence.

Another novelist of that day, whose work still lives, was the Abbé Prévost (1697-1763), whose *Manon Lescaut* is in itself an actual classic, and has likewise been the source of other popular works—an unhealthy school, perhaps, whose best-known products are the *Dame aux Camélias* and Verdi's opera *La Traviata*. It must be allowed that the idea of *Manon* is offensive; the characters are not only vicious but to some extent vulgar. Nevertheless, with all these disadvan-

tages, the book is, as it has always been, a universal favourite. To account for this we must remember two things: first, the varied life of the author, which supplied him with an extraordinary fund of experience; and secondly, that *Manon* is the hit of mediocrity, the one masterpiece left after years of practice and trial strokes unnumbered. Originally a monk, the author became a soldier, then turned priest, then returned to laic life, which he spent in Holland and London; finally coming home to France, and there ending his days as an ecclesiastic. Few writers have been more prolific; his stories are in general a tissue of romantic adventure. *Manon* is the solitary survivor of a hundred volumes.

The name of the Abbé Barthélemy may just be mentioned, not as a novelist, but because his *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis* is sometimes still used in schools. Born in 1716, he soon became noted for his power of acquiring linguistic knowledge, and preached in Arabic to Eastern strangers landing at Marseilles. *Anacharsis* did not appear until the eve of the Revolution, when pseudo-classicism was in one of its periodical frenzies. It is a medley of geography, philosophy, and literature, in which the tone of antiquity is but feebly preserved.

Nor must we entirely omit the name of Rollin (1661-1741), a good man who devoted himself to a modest but earnest study of ancient history. He has this in common with Barthélemy, that he held up an ideal picture of antiquity to emphasise the condemnation of actual evil. His treatise on Study (1728) has been pronounced by Villemain to be the best French book on the method of studying classical authors. His historical works appeared between 1730 and 1738.

Another writer must be mentioned, especially under the head of prose fiction, viz. Marivaux (1688-1763), whose over-refinement of sentiment and style has given rise to a new literary substantive, *marivaudage*, and who wrote comedies that are still acted. Voltaire, in speaking of some of these, observed incisively, 'This man knows all the paths of the

human heart, but has never found the highway.' It is to one of his tales, *Marianne*, that Marivaux is indebted for such reputation as he still enjoys. La Harpe declares that it is not only one of the best French novels, but one of those most relished by foreigners.

The only poet who deserves to be mentioned as belonging to this period is J. B. Rousseau (1670-1741). Deficient in inspiration—which, as we have said, was alien to the time—he is a cunning executant who, like Malherbe before him, tuned the lyre for abler hands. Most of his verse appeared before 1710, when the decay of the monarchy may be said to have begun. Like a painter whose colouring is better than his conception, like a musician whose want of melodic invention is concealed by his richness of harmony, Rousseau reminds us of the best lyrical work of our own Dryden. He imitated the *Psalms* of the Bible in varied and dignified verse; and wrote *Odes* on the events of the day which seem to have preserved some of the same fire. The copious extracts from his poems which La Harpe has given (vi. 375-424) will be found amply to justify this appreciation, which has been mainly borrowed from that critic. Rousseau's great skill is shown in antithesis. Take the following example:—

J'ai vu mes tristes jours
Décliner vers leur penchant,
Au midi de mes années
Je touchais à mon couchant;
La Mort, déployant ses ailes,
Couvrait d'ombres éternelles
La clarté dont je jouis;
Et, dans cette nuit funeste,
Je cherchais en vain le reste
De mes jours évanouis.

His life was sad. He tarnished his fame by writing obscene epigrams and libels, for which he was exiled from France in 1712, and in exile he died. His mantle—or that part of it which covered the sacred writer—fell on his admirer,

Lefranc de Pompignan, who offended Voltaire by the severity of his orthodox censure on irreligious writing, but whose lines on the death of Rousseau extorted the applause of that great and fastidious critic. Voltaire especially admired the conclusion, which is as follows :—

Le Nil a vu, sur ses rivages,
Les noirs habitants des déserts
Insulter, par leurs cris sauvages,
L'astre éclatant de l'univers :
Cris impuissants, fureurs bizarres !
Tandis que ces monstres barbares
Poussaient d'insolentes clameurs,
Le Dieu poursuivait sa carrière,
Versant des torrents de lumière
Sur ses obscurs blasphémateurs.

The Regent died in 1723, and a gleam of hope seemed to dawn on France. A young king, married to a charming young bride, and guided by a sagacious adviser, undertook the sadly-needed work of financial reform, which alone could have saved the kingdom. But the monarchy was in its last stage. For ten years Fleury maintained that condition of peace which was evidently necessary to enable the country to escape from the load of debt with which the operations of Law, and the general abuses of the administration, had charged it; and then began the end.

An isolated position among the writers of this time was filled by Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues (1715-1747). Originally an officer in the French army, he retired on account of ill-health, and died at the age of thirty-two, leaving no finished work behind him. He was a warm admirer of Voltaire, by whom the sentiment was returned. Nevertheless, the tone of his mind was serious, and he wrote with sympathy of the Christian religion. His works—*Maxims*, *Reflections*, *Characters*, and an *Essay on the Human Understanding*—are something like those of Pascal, something like those La Rochefoucauld. More of a man of the world

than the former, he is less of a cynic than the latter. He never falls into the mistake of confusing selfishness with natural self-love; the excellence of his moral nature became in him an intellectual force; and his writings everywhere illustrate his own maxim: *Les grandes pensées viennent du cœur*.

Vauvenargues wrote other things besides *Pensées*: Characters, in the manner of La Bruyère, and criticisms on French poets; but it is the *Pensées* by which he continues to survive. He has never been exactly popular; one is reminded of one of his own maxims:—

Les fortunes promptes, en tout genre, sont les moins solides.

His 'fortune' was not 'prompt,' but it was 'solid,' if the love and approbation of great minds can make it so. Less pungent and less showy than La Rochefoucauld, with his delicate smile, half pity, half contempt, Vauvenargues is far dearer to those with whom he becomes a favourite. Like Montaigne, he is an example of the magic of sympathy. We seem reminded by him of kindly, earnest persons whom we have met in real life. We may have sometimes deplored their lack of brilliancy, and thought them weak, until we knew them better; and then we found that their unselfish goodness was so genuine as to be a source of power, and a kind of greatness that we had not suspected. So it is with him. Vauvenargues is often trivial in thought, a fact of which he seems to have been conscious, when he offered the following explanation:—

Lorsqu'une pensée s'offre à nous comme une profonde découverte, et que nous prenons la peine de la développer, nous trouvons souvent que c'est une vérité qui court les rues.

Sometimes he is bald in expression: occasionally, in aiming at a paradox to attract attention, he only succeeds in stating a flat untruth. Note the following, either a truism or a falsehood as you choose to take it:—

La coutume fait tout, même en amour.

Yet, in spite of these faults, he has endeared himself to many superior judgments, even amid the jostle and clash of so much contemporaneous and subsequent competition. The fact is, as he himself says,—

Les maximes des hommes décèlent leur cœur.

Vauvenargues was far too good and pure for his age. As a mere movement of the human mind, we may truly say that the Revolution had now become necessary, though it was still uncertain what turn it would take. There were two tendencies at work. The old *bourgeois* spirit, which had shown itself in the fourteenth century, had never died out. The States-General had not been assembled for more than a century, but the *Parlement* of Paris kept alive the traditions of what, for want of a better word, we may call constitutional freedom. To this school were allied the jurists and economists, who, turning their eyes on England, wished to borrow the cool materialistic wisdom of Locke and the Whigs. Unprovided with political instincts, but strong for critical purposes, they sowed the wild oats of their intelligent discontent, in a manner apparently cold and sterile. This school was to culminate in the Economists, the Girondins, and the Doctrinaires. The other school appealed to the suffering millions; seeking, but too successfully, to inflame passions arising from the depths of national despair; often using language almost religious in its passionate fervour, but aimed against every existing institution of society and government. These men were the fathers of the Jacobins, and the grandfathers of the Nihilists of a still later day: and their dreadful work is by no means accomplished yet.

The defenders of the existing system were unheard; mostly, indeed, keeping silence. Meanwhile the monarchy held its fated way. Tortuous intrigues which led to nothing; costly and barren wars in which victory was almost as ruinous as defeat; Soubise and Pompadour, d'Aiguillon and Choiseul, all aided to blow the glittering bubble of false glory; while

the private life of the Court recalled the worst memories of the bad Valois kings. And this was not all. Not content with dissipating his finances and his energies with such companions as the Duc de Richelieu and Madame du Barri, the king employed himself in trafficking on the necessities of his people. Vast quantities of grain, collected under various pretences, were stored in the island of Jersey and other safe places, to be resold at famine prices. Chesterfield in 1753 predicted the approach of a revolution; about the same time Louis himself uttered the sinister words: 'After me the deluge, so that it lasts out my time!'

The remaining writers of the age of Louis XV were chiefly of the ornamental kind, though with a few memorable exceptions to be presently noticed.

J. B. L. Gresset (1709-77) was a contemporary of Lefranc de Pompignan, and, like him, a member of the Academy. His earlier work was trivial, though elegant. The *Image de la Vie* (1734) is a pretty sketch of a leaf on life's river, a commonplace analogy, but ending with these fine lines:—

Parmi ces erreurs contenues
Il fuit, il vogue, jusqu'au jour
Qui l'ensevelit, à son tour,
Au sein de ces mers immenses
Où tout s'abîme sans retours.

Gresset also wrote the tale of a parrot under the title of *Ververt*. Becoming devout as he grew old, he burned in his last days a quantity of MSS., for the loss of which the world has managed to find consolation.

Sedaine (1719-97) and Favart (1710-92) were writers of comic operas. The former was an Academician, and his *Select Works* have been published in three volumes. He was the librettist of the composer Grétry; and the story of the singing of his song, *Richard, O, mon Roi!* at the Court Theatre of Versailles (1st Oct. 1789) is a well-known episode of the great Revolution.

C. F. Panard (1694-1765) has been called the 'La Fontaine of song-writing.' He was a facile workman, of whom his contemporary and rival, Favart, said:—

Il chansonna le vice et chanta la vertu.

Alexis Piron (1689-1773), an enemy of Voltaire's, is now chiefly remembered in connection with that great author; he is also embalmed in the epitaph that he made on himself when rejected as a candidate for the Academy:—

Ci-gît Piron. Il ne fut rien—
Pas même Académicien.

He said, on passing the palace of this body, 'Voilà Quarante qui sont sages comme quatre.'

For us who have witnessed the centenary of 1789 it is interesting to note that it is not the events of that year, considered in itself, which merit the sentiment of disapproval that is usually connected with the name of 'The French Revolution.' The miseries of the lower class of Frenchmen, the great intelligence of the middle classes, the general worthlessness of the privileged classes, had long been remarked as forming a combination likely to lead to a catastrophe. The clergy and nobles refused to pay taxes; the Third Estate, which monopolised the honour of providing for the needs of the country, had no share in its administration; famine and financial failure called imperatively for remedial treatment. The meeting of the States-General and the proceedings of their earlier sessions excited the sympathies of the more generous citizens of surrounding communities. It was not until the educated leaders had died, fallen silent, or gone into hopeless exile or equally hopeless opposition, that the violence of a few rogues, fanatics, and half-insane quacks brought discredit upon the great undertaking. Thus we come to see that the 'French Revolution' is a term of singularly elastic meaning. Since those days there have been other revolutions

in France of the destructive sort; or, if reconstruction be a part of the business, then the French Revolution is far from being finished yet.

The bibliography of this immense subject is proportioned to its own vast scale. It would be impossible to take an adequate survey of all the literature of the Revolution within our present limits, but it may be worth while to notice briefly—

(1) What literature had to do with the immediate causes of the movement of 1789,

(2) What literature arose immediately out of it.

By way of further limitation, let us add, as regards our first question, that we have only to look to writings that are to be ranked among the direct instruments of change; those, in a word, which so obviously discredited the old system, and opened up new possibilities, as to make us feel that, without them, things would have taken a different turn. In the treatment of the second point, we have to look beyond the ephemeral and excited outcries, that merely reflected the hopes and fears of those distracted days following on the first emancipation. We must fix our attention chiefly upon such writings as could not be imagined to have come into existence had things gone otherwise, and had the Revolution, as we know it, never occurred.

First, then, in regard to the influence of literature on the Revolution. It would hardly seem far-fetched to argue that many ancient books—the Bible, Plutarch, the *Servitude* of La Boëtie—must have had a share in forming men's minds for a new state of things in the decline of the monarchy. But such books ought not to be reckoned among *direct* causes. They had existed in other times and had been read in other countries without leading to extreme theories, or to a general desire for a social catastrophe. In England there had been a religious Reformation, by which the Pope's supremacy had been discarded, and a new Church founded in subordination to the State. And there had been a Rebellion, in which

a King had been resisted, deposed, and executed; followed by a Revolution, in which the power of Parliament had been established, in substitution for the power of the Crown. But in all those English movements, the lessons of the remote past had never availed to produce a complete destruction of existing ideals and institutions, and a replacement of the social fabric by something entirely and intentionally different. It was not until these lessons had been translated into a new dialect, and the ideals recast in a new intellectual machinery, that such root-and-branch work became possible. Other causes combined, no doubt, but we must acknowledge that there were makers of books in France in the eighteenth century, of whom it may be safely said that, could they have been on the side of the Altar and the Throne, the French Revolution would have been no more violent or thorough than the reforms of other countries. While Germany, Austria, Spain, and Italy are to-day in the enjoyment of a measure of parliamentary and constitutional freedom, France, though physically and intellectually the most gifted of them all, is still in a state of something like political chaos. This melancholy result is in great measure due to the effect of certain exceptionally brilliant French writings upon the ardent French character.

The wisest of them all, and one who by himself would perhaps have done nothing but good, is Montesquieu. The changes to which he and Turgot pointed would have amounted only to a moderate constitutional reform—had such been possible in the France of that period. The privileges, prerogatives, and abuses by which administration was perverted and the multitude made miserable would have been abolished, and the country would have been left in possession of a sane and workable system. The influence of Turgot (1727-1781), like that of his successor, Necker (1732-1804), was mainly scientific. Unable to carry out their ideas in permanent practical administration, they embodied them in their writings. These writings were read by educated men, and the

ideas formed the basis of a new science. But the movement passed into other hands. Montesquieu was a little more fortunate than Turgot. Born in 1689, exactly a century before the assembling of the States-General of Versailles, he was in full sympathy with the matured centralisation of Louis XIV, under whom he held office, and amenable to the more liberal ideas that were coming in from England. No author of similar skill had arisen in England in the early part of the eighteenth century; but the works of Locke, Bolingbroke, and the Desists were filtering into French thought, as we shall see more clearly when we come to treat of Voltaire. Six years after the death of Louis XIV, when France was afflicted by the weak and prodigal rule of the Regent, the young magistrate¹ produced his *Lettres persanes* (1721). In this work, under the disguise of Persian travellers, the author vents hardy speculations on questions of government and even of religion. The evils of European society, the literary controversies, the light and futile tone of conversation, the vain pretensions of the clergy, the docile credulity of the people, all combine to form the subject of a comedy which anticipates Beaumarchais and Voltaire. The greater part of the social fabric was discussed which was afterwards to receive a deeper examination in the *Esprit des Lois*. Religion, philosophy, administration, commerce, and society all came under a disdainful criticism, as parts of a problem that was to come up for a more serious attempt at solution in the later and greater work. The Persian letters appeared towards the end of the Regency, and were then found 'amusing.' Such light weapons, it was thought, could never inflict wounds. The scampish rulers had neither time nor inclination to test the temper of the steel. Fleury was not more sagacious; and the author was admitted a member of the Academy in 1727, with the full consent of the Government. By this time he

¹ Montesquieu became President of the Parliament of Bordeaux in 1716. He tells us himself that, with the best intentions, he rather failed as a judge.

had ceased to hold office at Bordeaux; the work had always been uncongenial; and the manners of those times allowed him to sell his post. He travelled to various countries of Europe, and did not appear again as a serious writer till 1734. It was then that he published his *Considérations sur la Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*, in which he applied the principles of his system to the case of a single, though a vast and mighty empire. At length appeared (1748) the *Esprit des Lois*, of which Mme du Deffand said that it should rather have been called *L'esprit sur les lois*. This epigrammatic praise, from a person who perhaps had never studied the book, was merited by the conciseness and crispness of the style, in which, says the historian Martin, French idioms were treated like coins worn by use and reminted to give them a fresh relief. Montesquieu and Voltaire were the last reformers of their country's prose. It is no longer the instrument of narrative, it has become a sinew of war.

But the book had another and a far greater value. Based upon rocks that Voltaire never reached, it has formed a model to all subsequent builders on the same lines. Law, the author showed, was not, as it had hitherto been supposed, the mere expression of a sovereign will enforced by sovereign power. It is the inevitable result and symbol of preconstituted causes, evolved in each nation by the nation's peculiar circumstances. If we look into the exact and philosophic language in which this fruitful principle is proclaimed, we shall be struck not only by the style, but by its remarkable anticipation of the results of modern science.

Les lois sont les rapports nécessaires qui dérivent de la nature des choses; et, dans ce sens, tous les êtres ont leurs lois; la Divinité a ses lois, le monde matériel a ses lois . . . L'homme a ses lois . . . Il y a une raison primitive, et les lois sont les rapports qui se trouvent entre elle et les différents êtres, et les rapports de ces différents êtres entre eux . . . Avant qu'il y eût des lois faites il y avait des rapports de justice possibles. Dire qu'il n'y a rien de juste ni d'injuste que ce qu'ordonnent et défendent les lois positives, c'est dire qu'avant qu'on eût tracé de cercle tous les rayons n'étaient pas égaux.

This really profound saying justifies the use of the same word for the rules of action laid down by the supreme power in a State, and the principles of a science or an art educed from practice or observation.

The author proceeds to explain that man is not an abstract being: he depends on his surroundings, and differs in different situations. Among his surroundings and situations, we must have regard principally to climate and physical geography, and then to the conditions and habits that grow out of them. Inspired by this idea, the author is far from desiring sudden changes, or speculative experiments, which may only breed chimeras. 'Je me croirais bien récompensé de mon travail,' he says in his preface, 'si après m'avoir lu chacun trouvait dans mon livre de nouvelles raisons d'aimer le pays où il est né, et le gouvernement sous lequel il vit.'

With these exceptions, there is little *à priori* reasoning to be found in the book. Using the inductive method, the author traces the origins of society and government, so far as they were then known; and inquires what have been the most successful political systems. 'Le gouvernement le plus conforme à la Nature est celui qui se rapporte mieux à la disposition du peuple pour lequel il est établi . . . Les lois doivent se rapporter . . . au physique du pays, au climat.' Passing to the different forms of government he lays down the often-debated principle that the characteristic of a Republic is *Virtue*; of a mixed Monarchy, *Honour*; of a Despotism, *Fear*. He does not mean by this—as his opponents have assumed—that these are the necessary *products*, but that they are the essential *principles* of each system, without which it cannot be maintained in its integrity. Democracy, he asserts, is only suited to small states; yet a great Empire can become a Republic by the use of a federative constitution. Let each kind of government, excepting despotism, which is the negation of law, be maintained by its own proper laws. 'On sent les abus anciens, on en voit la correction, mais on voit aussi les abus de la correction même; on laisse le mal si l'on craint

le pire ; on laisse le bien si l'on est en doute du mieux.' Other things being equal, the constitution of Great Britain, as it appeared to him, was theoretically the best ; the Crown being restrained by the jealousy of an hereditary Aristocracy, and the sanction of the whole Nation being necessary before money could be raised or spent. The evils of each system were thus left to be neutralised by the tendencies of the others.

This calm deliberative view, enforced by an equally judicial firmness and dignity of diction, had the drawback of leading to no absolute award. Twenty-five millions of unprotected persons were slowly perishing of dulness and distress ; and the grave conclusions of the ex-president, being incapable of immediate execution, made no immediate impression on the popular mind. Even the educated classes, their impatience and sentimentality stirred by more impassioned voices, were not then able to take up the reasoning of Montesquieu, or see their way to a rational reform. We learn from contemporary observers that the first note of dissatisfaction with the existing system was sounded by the courtiers and rural nobles who attended the Assembly of Notables convened by Calonne in 1787, of which Carlyle has failed to give an intelligible account. The reasons of Calonne's failure are plainly stated by La Harpe, in an address written only six years later :—

Calonne was entirely deceived : the young lords brought to the assembly the politics of Rousseau and the Deism of Voltaire : these had, for a long while, been forming the mental food and the fashionable tone of good society.

Hence it came to pass that the French Revolution cut itself off from the past of France ; and it has failed, as yet, to produce many fruitful institutions. Meanwhile, the other nations of Europe have fully justified Montesquieu's doctrine, by adopting such portions of the constitutional system as have been found appropriate to the conditions and traditions of each. Only in two countries do we now see the elements of

ruin: in Russia, where despotism refuses all reform, and in France herself, where the reform has been too deep.

To understand the literary influences to which La Harpe, writing at the time, ascribed the excesses of the French Revolution, we must go back to the period of the Regency, and note the appearance of Voltaire.

Arouet, called de Voltaire (1694-1778), resembled Montesquieu in not being a violent Radical; but in most other respects he was entirely different, and his influence was much more immediately felt. He was not a judge, but an advocate; and his primary object was to prevail over his adversary. His nature, moreover, was ardent; and his habit of mockery provided him with one of the most powerful organs ever used by a writer. Deeply stirred by the sufferings caused by superstition and privilege, surrounded in his youth by sceptical associations, he was driven into further hostility by unjust persecution. Exiled in his twenty-seventh year, after two imprisonments, he spent the next three years in England, where he appears to have become acquainted with Lord Bolingbroke. He returned to France in 1729, and soon showed, in various ways, what lessons he had been learning. After two dramas, he published (1734) his *Lettres sur les Anglais*, in which he plainly declared on what side he had definitively engaged. To his natural insubordination of character he added a liking for the liberty he had seen in London, where any man, within clear and wide limits, was free to express his freest thoughts; a decided taste for natural science; and an appreciation of the doctrines of Newton and Locke. All this appeared in the *Lettres* (subsequently incorporated in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*), and the ideas were combined with certain new views of dramatic writing. Voltaire had at this time some glimpses of Shakspeare's merits; still more did he share the then prevailing admiration for Addison's *Cato*. He therefore determined to make more of the romantic element in the drama, at the same time that he maintained the classical form as a vehicle for political

and religious criticism. Ten years earlier, in that most marvellous piece of precocity *Œdipe*, he had hazarded the well-known couplet:—

Nos prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple pense;
Notre credulité fait toute leur science.

The authorities continued their alarm: the *English Letters* were burnt by decree of the Parliament of Paris, and the Government once more banished Voltaire from the capital. For the rest of his long life the author was in a chronic state of opposition. It was rather of the nature of a *Fronde* than of downright rebellion; but it was carried out with unwearying energy, and multifarious accomplishment. We shall not probably be far wrong if we say that Voltaire was never quite first-rate in any walk of literature. His views were not far-reaching; his knowledge was somewhat superficial; the high-pressure rapidity of his work betrayed him into blemishes and blunders of thought, of prosody, and even of grammar. But there has never been a writer who attained second-class honours in so many schools. Epic poetry, burlesque, and lyric verse, history, science, a ceaseless flow of private correspondence, a constant influence in the *Encyclopédie* and, ultimately, in the Academy; such were among the various resources of this gladiator of peace, this truculent despot of freedom. What the Society of Jesus had been to the Post-Tridentine Church was hardly more than was this one man for the new Propaganda. His wit, good sense, and apparent simplicity combined, with a style of matchless dexterity, to make Voltaire at once a classic and a popular writer; and these have secured him fame, even among those who are most shocked at his anti-fanatical fanaticism.

It was in his less controversial efforts that this born combatant was least successful. Conscious of the necessity of gaining the public ear, Voltaire made an early attempt in drama, which was then, as now, a very popular form of literature in France. What he had seen of the early English

drama had not satisfied him. Shakspeare seemed to him a great madman, with admirable moments. His own earliest efforts for the stage appear, as we have already observed, rather inspired by the *Cato* of Addison. Down to 1760 he continued, from time to time, to produce tragedies which, if not highly dramatic, are full of the contemporary philosophy, and entitle him to be considered the Euripides of France. In serious poetry the *Henriade* is chiefly known to us from school experiences. The machinery of the epic is ill-suited to the conduct of the modern story;¹ and even in this frigid element he is far below the level of the *Jerusalem Delivered*. Like all that he did, however, the *Henriade* is full of splendid workmanship, bright narrative, and clear reasoning. In the lighter walks of verse his Epistles and metrical tales will always be sure of admiration. The miserable *Pucelle* need not be alluded to, except to say that those who wish to gain an idea of a work which is an opprobrium to Voltaire, his country, and his cause, may consult La Harpe (*Lycée* viii. 178 ff.). The same critic does ample justice to the *Henriade* for its wealth of literary resource, and masterly perfection of versification: also to the wonderful prose tales, of which *Candide* is the best known, but *L'Ingénu* the most prized.

The influence of Rousseau was even greater than that of Voltaire. No two men could seem more unlike to contemporary observation than the aspiring man of the world, full of Regency manners, and the Swiss lackey, with modern sentimentality and no manners at all. Voltaire was a highly cultivated product of civilisation, while Rousseau affected to believe, if he did not believe entirely, that civilisation was the cause of all social maladies. Hence his teaching, poisoned at its source by this sophistry, was exactly suited to do the minimum of good and the maximum of harm to a people of hereditary bondsmen, especially excitable, vain, and ill-educated, like the mass of the reading public of France in the eighteenth century. When the constitutional

¹ See Macaulay's early squib, *The Wellingtoniad*.

reform movement of 1789 had broken down, and power had passed into the hands of untrained visionaries and a club of homicidal maniacs, it was inevitable that the most unhesitating propositions should find the most ready acceptance. Thus it came about that the gospel according to Rousseau, while putting no restraint upon the criminals of the time, continued to supply them with specious texts and sonorous maxims.

The whole literary tone meanwhile showed more and more credulity, sentimentality, and weak judgment. Science, however, made its way; and, however flimsy the literary work, speculative thought of a materialistic character became at once bold, active, and aggressive. Diderot and D'Alembert conducted the *Encyclopédie*, of which more anon, with the aid of powerful contributors. Helvétius (1715-71) and D'Holbach (1723-89)—though neither of them either French by blood, or sound men of science—wrote articles, and also produced independent works which had great vogue at the time. The former, in his treatise *De l'Esprit*, carried out Locke's view of the human understanding to an extreme conclusion; while the latter, in his *Système de la Nature*, anticipated some of the opinions of the modern Positivists. Both agreed in founding moral philosophy on a common basis of self-gratification, and may be looked upon as French Epicureans of the materialistic school. On the lighter side of literature, Colardeau, Crébillon the younger, and, above all, Dorat, diluted amatory poetry with pastoral pigments and the tears of sensibility. Of these C. J. Dorat (1734-80) had perhaps the most original talent; but he frittered his mind away in impossible versatility, as he dissipated his property and his bodily health in extravagant living. Piron (already mentioned), Chamfort, and Rivarol, extended into epigram and light writing the acid sap of the Voltairian propaganda.

On the other side no great man took up the cause of reverence, caution, or moderation. An epidemic of discontent was spread over mankind. The audacious comedies of Beau-

marchais attracted all classes to the theatre where they could see the nobility deceived and lectured, and the plebeian barber triumphant. From his birth at a watch-maker's in 1732 to his death as a disappointed speculator in 1799, this volatile adventurer never seemed to rest. His other works are forgotten, but the *Barbier de Séville* and the *Noces de Figaro* are among the classics of the world. But the fabric of society was now rapidly assuming a condition when it would collapse at the first rude shock.

The three great serious writers of the period have been named; and Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau might have succeeded in stemming the current of destruction, if they could have combined their efforts. They were all, however, on the destructive side. The first maintained that the existing form of government was unnatural, and could not endure; seeing that there was a necessary right in the nation to have its affairs regulated by 'natural' law. The second, in a hundred persuasive ways, taught that the Church was an infamous organisation of oppression, which must be crushed by every available means, fair or unfair—having first been deprived of the protection of the secular arm. The third was not without some of the earnestness of the Swiss peasant, and an unlikely associate for the noble jurist and the poet of Parisian and European fashion, the historian of kings and their chosen literary confidant. Yet it was this very element of plebeian puritanism that enabled J. J. Rousseau (1712-78) to complete the work of the other two. For he it was who, throwing wide an already open door, hurled upon the holders of power the retort which they can hardly be said to have provoked. The consent of the People, he said, was a far mightier force than all the armies of the greatest kings; and it was this doctrine—constantly proclaimed with every appearance of conviction and a most fascinating eloquence, and accepted by high and low—that gave currency and strength to the other systems. In this way the doctrines of Montesquieu and Voltaire, which might long have remained the Platonic tenets

of a select few, became general among multitudes, who were unable to understand them thoroughly, and incapable of applying them with moderation. Rousseau thoroughly succeeded in one thing. He did not destroy despotism, he only displaced it. He transferred it from a king, the leader of an effete feudalism, to a multitude less selfish but less responsible. This speculative hallucination of a great but morbid mind, being rashly and recklessly carried into effect, had sinister consequences in the crimes and sorrows of the succeeding generation. If the movement of 1792 rendered the movement of 1789 abortive, the fault was primarily attributable to the labours of this man, of whom it was said at the time that 'he was at once the most subtle of sophists, the most rhetorical of writers, and the most shameful of cynics' (La Harpe).

It is unnecessary to exemplify these remarks by extracts. Open Rousseau where you will, and the fact will become evident to all who wish to test the truth of the opinions here advanced. There is nothing new in them: but it can never be superfluous to dwell upon the heavy responsibilities of genius as applied to popular literature. A few words on Jean Jacques as a writer of prose fiction will be found under that head in the last chapter.

CHAPTER VI

THE AGE OF REASON

Part II

THE Age of Reason was now about to meet its nemesis. The qualities it fostered made their own abuse easy. Long before the end came, its inevitable approach could be perceived by men of clear vision. Chesterfield's saying has been noticed: a few years later Voltaire wrote as follows, in a private letter to the Marquis de Chauvelin, dated in 1764:—

All that I see is sowing the seeds of a Revolution, which will infallibly happen, although I cannot have the pleasure to witness it. On the first opportunity, there will be an outburst; and a fine commotion will ensue.

This is unequivocal proof that the versatile iconoclast saw what was coming, and did not regret it. Rousseau, in his *Emile*—a didactic tale about education published in the same year—expressed his own forecast with equal plainness though with more seriousness of style:—

Trust not (he says) to the existing order of society without remembering that such an order is subject to inevitable revolutions, and that it is not possible for you to predict or prevent the state of things with which your successors may have to deal. The great become small, the rich grow poor, the monarch may turn into a subject . . . We approach a state of crisis, and an age of revolution.

There is too much levity in Voltaire's way of putting things, but these great writers, who differed in so many ways, are at one in their predictions. Only they do not seem as if they

were aware how much they themselves had to do with the movement. They were in truth not only its prophets but its priests.

Before we notice more fully the part taken by men of letters in the great cataclysm, it may be as well to look at a few eminent writers who stood apart and exercised a better influence.

Gilbert (1751-80), in a short and unhappy life, produced satires which showed a genuine sincerity of thought and style. Gilbert was also the author of some verses on a young poet's death, which have been popular from his day to our own. The story goes that the author was ruined by neglect and want of friends; and, when taken into a hospital to die, he is supposed to have written the lines referred to. There is genuine pathos in some of them: though the poet's alleged destitution is a little at variance with a part of the story which attributes his last illness to a fall from his horse. Some of the lines may be found worth a sympathetic glance:—

J'ai révélé mon cœur au Dieu de l'innocence;
Il a vu mes pleurs penitents,
Il guérit mes remords, il m'arme de constance;
Les malheureux sont ses enfants.

Soyez béni, mon Dieu! vous qui daignez me rendre
L'innocence et son noble orgueil;
Vous qui, pour protéger le repos de ma cendre,
Veillerez près de mon cercueil.

Au banquet de la vie, infortuné convive,
J'apparus un jour, et je meurs;
Je meurs, et sur ma tombe, où lentement j'arrive,
Nul ne viendra verser des pleurs.

Another legend says that Gilbert went mad, and killed himself by swallowing a key! The touching stanza which ends our extract, taken in connection with the shortness of his life and the merit of his work, make us feel that his case is another instance of wasted gifts and ironical destiny.

Parny (1753-1814) has been called the 'French Tibullus.' These pretty lines are the conclusion of a little poem by him on the death of a young girl:—

Sans murmurer contre ces lois,
Ainsi le sourire s'efface;
Ainsi meurt, sans laisser de trace,
Le chant d'un oiseau dans les bois.

The musketeer Dorat has been already named as a foppish but clever writer of the time. A sort of *rococo* pastoral is Dorat's favourite vein; but it is not without a grace of its own, and his *Mois de Mai*, in which he anticipates the celebration of the marriage of the heir-apparent with the Archduchess Marie Antoinette, contains some good description and skilful versification, besides a note of genuine sympathy for the sufferings of the poor. His *Baisers*, founded on the *Basia* of Johannes Secundus, is a collection of graceful trifles, very warm and voluptuous, but within the limits of good taste. He wrote several plays, and might have been a member of the Academy if he had not offended the Patriarch of Ferney.

The Chevalier de Florian (1755-1794) was a literary pupil of Voltaire, by whom he was highly esteemed. He wrote two prose novels—*Numa Pompilius* and *Gonsalve de Cordoue*—and a quantity of light verse of which a volume of *Fables* alone can be said to have survived him. He strikes one as a sort of respectable Dorat, without his erotic extravagances, but also without his originality and without his pity for the poor. B. le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) is noticeable for his longevity, even among French men of letters: his best-known work is the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, which has been highly commended by French critics for the charm of its style. His mother was a sister of Corneille; and he incurred the ridicule of La Bruyère for taking part with La Motte in the anti-classic reaction of the Age of Glory. He was attacked by most

of the great writers of that age, but he survived them all, and became himself the chief authority and high-priest of the Muses. Another writer whose works are still remembered is Marmontel (1723-99), best known in his own day for his *Contes moraux*, though the works now most connected with his name are *Bélisaire* and *Les Incas*, pleasant tales often used in schools. Condillac (1715-80) was more a philosopher than a man of letters; he was the founder of the French school of sensationalists, who thought they were following Locke when they were leading to D'Holbach. Above all the non-controversial writers of the time stands the industrious and splendid George Louis Leclerc, better known as the Comte de Buffon (1707-88) who exemplified in his person the maxim attributed to him that 'the style is the man himself.' In his *Histoire Naturelle*—a work which occupied him forty years—he not only gave a complete survey of the world, as then known, in noble diction, but he anticipated the discoveries of modern science, by showing that an unbroken succession of forms could be traced throughout the animal kingdom; thus suggesting to Lamarck, and others, a new classification, and the pregnant idea of the origin of species.

But the end of all this artificial existence was drawing near. Buffon had been wont to retire to his study, and supervise the labours of his assistants,—shaven, powdered, with lace ruffles at his wrists and a gold-hilted sword by his side,—and to appear in his parish church on Sunday, the centre of an admiring congregation; and a year after his death, Siéyès, in a Parisian garret, was writing—on a hint from Chamfort—the pamphlet in which he asked the question, '*Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat ?*' and supplying himself with the monosyllabic answer '*Tout.*' In this he only developed what Rousseau had said nearly a quarter of a century before, in his *Lettres de la Montagne*, that arbitrary power, being the source of all disorders, 'to employ it for their prevention is like killing men lest they should catch fever.'

It may be difficult to decide positively how far some other writings of the time immediately preceding the Revolution were among the causes of the catastrophe, and how far they were symptoms or products of a political epidemic. Both Voltaire and Rousseau died more than ten years before the movement had become general, and are rather to be reckoned amongst its causes than its consequences. Diderot and D'Alembert died a few years later, but their connection with the movement was similar, if less direct or powerful. They were joint editors of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*. Of this famous work the first volume was published at Paris in 1751, *avec approbation et privilège du roi*, and was dedicated to D'Argenson the younger, who was then Secretary of State for War. But the auspices were not favourable for long: the clergy availed themselves of the Pietism aroused at Court by the attempt of Damiens; the orthodox press was let loose in opposition; and the Parliament of Paris condemned the publication. The later volumes had to be prepared in secret; D'Alembert withdrew his aid, so valuable for the scientific parts of the work; and Diderot, under a thousand difficulties,¹ brought out the seventeenth and last volume at Neuchâtel in 1765. The original publisher, one Le Breton, of Paris, had conceived the idea of a French Encyclopaedia from the great success of the English work of the same kind by Ephraim Chambers; and there was little in the first volume to excite the suspicions of the most timid rulers. The articles on theological and metaphysical subjects were announced as being contributed by clergymen; and the article *Âme* (i. 327-53) will be found a cautious and even orthodox essay on the metaphysical basis of the difference between men and beasts, and the hopes of immortality derived from Revelation.

A supplement to the *Encyclopédie* was published at Amster-

¹ Including the treachery of Le Breton, whom Diderot chastised in a scathing letter for tampering with his proofs in the interests of orthodoxy.

dam in 1776-7. This part of the work was in four volumes, and professed to contain contributions by D'Alembert, Daniel Bernouilli, Condorcet, and others. The supplement also embraced a history of literature by Marmontel. On the whole the *Encyclopédie* may be regarded as a colossal failure. In the first place, it was too diffuse. A dictionary of this sort cannot take the place of a complete library, and the attempt to combine a number of exhaustive treatises on all the branches of human attainment is a vain ambition, as well as a superfluity. What the unlearned reader wants is what the second title promised, viz. a reasoned dictionary, showing in a few well-chosen sentences the points which contemporaneous knowledge has reached on each subject, with a bibliography referring him to the best books on each. A second fault was the controversial character of many of the articles; rising, in the later volumes especially, to an organised attack on all existing opinions and institutions—see for example the articles on *Fanaticism* and *Unitarians*. When to this we add the mutual admiration indulged without restraint by the more prominent writers, it is easy to understand the anger, both of the Parliament and the Church, at what must have seemed a conspiracy against society.

In the *Encyclopédie*, as in almost all the other intellectual work of the time, Voltaire was distinguished; and his good sense and literary judgment saved him from participating in the weaknesses and errors of his associates. The contributions of D'Alembert also, being chiefly on mathematical subjects, in which he was an acknowledged master, were of real value, although somewhat too prolix for their purpose. It is to Diderot, above all others, that the failure of the work must be attributed. An inexhaustible improvisator, he wrote as he talked, pell-mell, and without reflection or restraint. Although the completion of the *Encyclopédie*—in the face of the intrinsic weaknesses of the work, and the hostility which it provoked—owed much to his unflagging energy, he was little suited to be the conductor of an enterprise in which

severe method was the first requirement. Diderot's other best-known productions are *La Religieuse*, a novel aimed at the alleged evils of conventual life; and a spirited dialogue, *Le Neveu de Rameau*. His paradox on the dramatic art is well known, and has led to discussion which is still maintained. His style is unequal, displaying many flashes of wit and sagacity, in a sky of considerable darkness. The works of his colleague, D'Alembert, have been superseded by modern discovery, but his preliminary discourse (*De l'Encyclopédie*) is still read, and was reprinted, as lately as 1888, in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.

It may, therefore, be concluded that Diderot and D'Alembert were not themselves sufficient to inspire or direct the movement of the last century; though they doubtless co-operated with that movement, to which their own work was due.

It devolves upon us now to consider briefly the writers to which the Revolution gave birth. When the destructive element was in its full career—say from 1792 to the middle of 1794—the Muses were for the most part silent. Journalism, indeed, was never more active: and we know, from Carlyle's brilliant sketch, something of the journalism of The Terror.¹

At the beginning of 1789 there were but two newspapers in Paris: the *Gazette de France*, and the *Journal de Paris*, 'in which,' we are told, 'Garat, André Chénier, Roucher, and other men of distinction, won their spurs.'² In that year the *Moniteur* made its first appearance, its most important contributor being La Harpe. The *Journal des Débats* followed, started by Barère and Louvet, both notorious if not famous men. Marat, Camille Desmoulins, and the infamous Hébert started journals on the extreme democratic side. The terrorist journalism was such as Carlyle has described it—breathless, bloody, and illiterate. The names deserving permanent recognition among the journalists above-mentioned are not numerous; the most remarkable are those of Chénier and La

¹ *French Revolution*, II. Bk. i. c. 4.

² Saintsbury, p. 464.

-Harpe, moderate men who have left something better than leading articles. The others may be swiftly despatched. Garat (1749-1833) was Minister of Justice in 1793, and afterwards one of the *idéologues* of the Consulat, associated with Guinguené and Cabanis in the *Décade philosophique*. Roucher, a disciple of Rousseau, wrote a didactic pastoral, *Les Mois*, which was severely criticised by La Harpe; he was a man of excellent character but of feeble judgment, and was one of the last victims of the Terror. Of Barère we have heard enough in Macaulay's scathing diatribe; Louvet, the author of a novel of adventure,¹ is better known as a bold Girondist and opponent to Robespierre, who contrived to escape from France when most of his associates were massacred.

André Chénier (1762-1794)—not, so far as can be learned, 'de Chénier' as written by Mr. Saintsbury²—was a man far superior to any of these. The son of a diplomatic official by a Greek mother, he was from childhood accustomed to Greek ideas and the sound of the Greek language. In Guy's *Voyage Littéraire* will be found two letters on modern Greece by Mme Chénier, his mother, which are both learned and clever; and André's brother, though not, like him, a man of original genius, was also an accomplished writer. With such antecedents, and an excellent French education, André took naturally to literature, and translated minor Greek poetry in his fifteenth year. His poetry continued to the last to bear the classical stamp; but it was not the pseudo-classicism of Florian and Dorat, ultimately destined to produce the romantic reaction, and to lead to the lamentable realism of to-day. André's Muse was neither the highly-rouged lady of the Théâtre Français, nor the cold goddess of Parnassus, but a modest nymph whom he sought by the banks of streams and in neglected meadows. Thus, within the shrines of Poly-

¹ The *Chevalier de Faublas*.

² The name is given without the nobiliary particle by Littré: as also on the title-page of the collected works, *Œuvres de Chénier*, 2 vols., Guillaume, Paris, 1826.

theism, this modern pagan finds a true and living sentiment of the universal power. His *Jeune Captive*—written on a fellow prisoner, Mlle de Coigny, under the shadow of the scaffold—breathes the spirit of modern sentiment in all the purity of an ancient style.

L'épi naissant mûrit de la faux respecté;
 Sans crainte du pressoir le pampre, tout l'été,
 Boit les doux présens de l'Aurore;
 Et moi, comme lui belle, et jeune comme lui,
 Quoi que l'heure présente ait de trouble et d'ennui,
 Je ne veux point mourir encore.

O! Mort, tu peux attendre: éloigne, éloigne-toi;
 Va consoler les cœurs que la honte, l'effroi,
 Le pâle désespoir dévore:
 Pour moi Palès encore a des asiles verts,
 Les Amours des baisers, les Muses des concerts;
 Je ne veux point mourir encore.

The youth, whose sympathy, when awaiting the guillotine himself, could thus occupy itself with a fellow sufferer, possessed one of the highest gifts of a poet—sincerity. He went to the scaffold only two days before the fate of Robespierre was to open the prisons; as the tumbril bore them on their last road he talked to his companions of poetry, and said, placing his hand on his forehead, 'Et pourtant, j'avais quelque chose là.'

Throughout the year 1791, Chénier contributed patriotic essays to the *Moniteur*. In 1792 he transferred his services to the *Journal de Paris*; and in both he did his best to plead the cause of moderate freedom, and boldly impugned the words and deeds of the Jacobins. In 1793, at the request of Malesherbes, he drafted the manly and dignified letter, in which Louis XVI made his last appeal to his cruel and unjust judges. As this paper is not generally known, a few passages may be transcribed. They give a favourable specimen of the writer's prose.

Messieurs [the King dates on the 17th January, 1793], 'J'ai paru sans murmure devant votre tribunal, j'ai répondu à toutes vos questions avec candeur et simplicité. Je n'ai fait aucune réflexion sur la nature de plusieurs de ces questions, les regardant toutes comme également propres à manifester ma droiture et mon innocence . . . Je ne me suis servi, ni des maximes éternelles du droit des gens, ni des observations publiées par plusieurs même d'entre vous, pour élever des doutes sur votre compétence . . . Il était pourtant visible que les formes—si nécessaires à observer dans toutes les causes ordinaires—l'étaient peut-être plus encore dans celle-ci; car elles ont été inventées, comme une digue à la toute-puissance et aux passions . . . Messieurs, j'en appelle au Peuple français, dont j'ai reconnu la souveraineté en acceptant la Constitution. Je demande qu'il soit consulté; je demande à discuter par écrit devant lui l'acte d'accusation que vous avez dressé contre moi . . . Ce n'est pas le désir de conserver des jours bien malheureux qui m'engage à cette démarche . . . mais je pense qu'outre l'éternelle équité, qui l'exige, l'honneur de la Nation et le vôtre est intéressé au succès de cet appel . . . Je pense, enfin, Messieurs, que le refus d'une demande aussi juste et aussi simple pourrait inspirer aux autres plus de doutes que j'en ai moi-même sur l'impartialité de votre jugement.

One can hardly imagine anything more suited to the occasion than these gentle pleadings put by Chénier into the mouth of the harmless sovereign. But, addressed to the dominant party, they fell as pearls before swine; and the Revolution was finally committed to the most miserable course of gratuitous crime, by which a great movement was ever marred and a great nation ever discredited. Yet the passage deserves to be noticed as a model of sympathetic imagination expressed with manly simplicity.

More lucky than his young *confrère*, La Harpe (1739-1803) maintained the attitude of a moderate, without any dishonest concession, and without incurring the last penalty of Jacobin hostility. His *Cours de Littérature* or *Lycée*, published posthumously in sixteen volumes, shows that he never ceased to attack the action of the clubs until they were closed at last by the triumph of humanity and good sense. Of Swiss origin, born of poor parents at Paris, left an orphan at the age of

nine, bred and instructed by charity, La Harpe, in his twenty-fourth year, attracted the notice of the Court and the favour of Voltaire by a successful drama, preceded by a 'letter' on Tragedy. Up to the year 1789 he continued the life of an industrious man of letters, having become an Academician in 1776. For some time he honestly supported the work of reform. It may be recollected that, even in England, most enlightened persons approved the earlier movements of moderate and rational reform. In 1793, and the beginning of 1794, he edited the *Mercure Français*, as an organ of the constitutional democracy. But the Jacobins were not satisfied, and arrested him on the usual sort of charge. He passed the latter half of the year imprisoned in the Luxembourg; and when he left it in December, he came out a conservative in politics and in religion. On the last day of the year he began the lectures, which form the basis of his celebrated *Cours*, a critical history of European letters from Homer to his own time. This work, cut short by death, is a marvel of technical skill and judgment, though, perhaps unavoidably, it wants symmetry as a whole. The classical part is weak. Lucan occupies three times as much space as Virgil, while the historians of Greece are despatched in four pages. In modern literature, some of La Harpe's enemies are treated with a few perfunctory phrases that had probably done duty elsewhere; Beaumarchais and Fabre d'Eglantine fill over 120 pages. In the warmth of his admiration for Voltaire, he calls *King Lear* the most absurd of all Shakspeare's plays. He speaks of the follies of *Othello*, and says *Zaire* is a far finer play. At the same time he does not hesitate to point out blemishes in his idol when he sees them; and, on the whole, there is no author to whom we owe more for what he has said of French authors, so just in its scientific severity, and so discriminative in its measured admiration.

While the men of the Left Centre—the disciples of Turgot and Montesquieu—were thus sowing in storm the harvest of the remote future, a few brilliant Conservatives were vainly

endeavouring to oppose the advance of all reform with the weapons of the past. More interesting, however, is the fact that there were children then in the cradle who were one day to beautify democracy, and to carry out reaction rationally.

Joseph de Maistre (1754-1821) and the Vicomte de Bonald (1753-1840) took up the defence of 'the altar and the throne'; while the eloquent Chateaubriand (1768-1848) treated both as pegs on which to hang the bright folds of his prose; and Béranger (1780-1857) revived the old French lyre, and tuned it to the praise of success in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte. Neither De Maistre nor Bonald achieved any permanent success for their somewhat antiquated doctrines; neither Béranger nor Chateaubriand was much in earnest in extolling the different forms of absolutism.

De Maistre is spoken of by M. Demogeot as a 'chief of the theocratic school,' and one who had 'vowed a mortal hate to every kind of liberty.' His three works, *Les Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*, *Le Pape*, and *L'Eglise gallicane*, are welded links of the chain with which he tried to bind the thoughts of his readers. Man naturally perverse, suffering needed as a propitiation, the apotheosis of the despot and the headsman, the boundless authority of the Papacy—such are the bold and startling principles of this writer, stated with almost insolent frankness. He has been called 'a Catholic Hobbes.' His popularity, such as it was, arose, according to Lamartine, who knew him, out of the worth and earnestness of the man. Bonald was a less forcible but more conciliatory thinker; he had some influence under the Restoration, which he owed to a certain mathematical clearness of exposition, making Life a sort of Rule of Three, e.g. 'the cause is to the means as the means to the effect'; but his work was futile, and it has gone to the limbo of all such things. He himself, modestly but not untruly, characterised it as 'un rêve politique qui demande à prendre place parmi tant de fictions et de romans moins innocents.' In politics, as in religion, he was an absolutist; and may be taken as the extreme opposite of Rousseau, as

De Maistre is the opposite of Voltaire. This polarity was, in each, the natural effect of a conscious reaction; and both these reactionary writers are direct consequences of the Revolution, which they regarded as chaos and an unmixed evil.

Of Chateaubriand it may be said that, except in being a nobleman, he was as unlike Bonald as possible. In him the effects of the Revolution were shown not in reaction, but in a strange aesthetic scepticism, which had the power of creating enthusiasm. Of his own opinions he said, when he was between fifty and sixty, 'Je suis républicain par inclination, bourbonien par devoir, et monarchiste par raison.' In a similar spirit he called himself 'démocrate par principes, et aristocrate par mœurs.' Though he had lost all his kindred in the Revolution, and with them his personal property and the privileges of his birth, he could not close his eyes to the prospects of a reasonable freedom. Extremely lawless in his relations towards women, and showing no sense of the moral claims of religion as a 'categorical imperative,' he yet wrote a most eloquent defence of Christianity. His reason for doing so will appear to some most characteristically French. His mother died praying for him with her latest breath; and from that moment Chateaubriand, by his own account, bowed his head to the yoke of the Church. 'J'ai pleuré,' he said, 'et j'ai cru.' His most esteemed works are *Atala* and *René*, the Byronic monuments of his youthful wanderings in the Old World and the New; *Le Génie du Christianisme*; *Les Martyrs*, an historical romance; and another (of which the scene was laid in later times), *Le Dernier des Abencerrages*.

If Chateaubriand was something of an aristocratic hypocrite, what are we to say of Béranger; a man of the people, who used the particle of nobility; a democrat, who worshipped the mighty military monarchy? He is admired for his artistic precision of language, his almost classical purity of style, his self-possession, out of the midst of which one hears the lyric cry. But there are also not a few among his

countrymen who describe him as a man endowed with a forced if not a feigned geniality, and who call him 'un faux bonhomme.'

Perhaps the other best-known products of the Revolutionary epoch are Charles Nodier and Paul Louis Courier. The former (1783-1844) was a librarian by profession, and a man of strong literary power, which he rather weakened by versatility. He is best remembered as a precursor of the Romantic revival. His workmanship was exquisite; but he claimed to have had from the first a Pisgah-prospect of the promised land of Romanticism: 'J'étais seul, dans ma jeunesse,' he writes, 'à pressentir l'infailible avènement d'une littérature nouvelle.'

Paul Louis Courier (1773-1825), by birth a farmer, and by training a soldier, would, but for his unquenchable thirst for classical learning, remind us of an English contemporary, Cobbett. Form and style in him come almost to perfection. He could see nothing but ridiculous pretensions in the Empire of Napoleon; the Restoration appeared to him a succession of miserable intrigues. Although he never took an active part in politics, the principles of 1789 had 'sunk deep into his mind,' as Mr. Saintsbury says, and he expressed them in a style which has been compared to that of Junius, but which rather suggests a Sydney Smith confined to pamphleteering. On the whole, barren as was the period of the Empire and early Restoration, it was but the blighted summer that follows an unhappy spring. There was nothing in the mental habits of the end of the eighteenth century to promise any better.

M. Ernest Renan said, in his reception of M. Claretie at the Academy, and referring to the new member's book called *Prairial*, that the revolutionary literature was, in his opinion, below the level of the occasion:—

These artificers of a work of giants, when you look at them closely, turn out to be, themselves, pygmies. It was the grandeur of the work which took possession of them and made them great.

The situation took them by storm, enfevered them, transformed them to its needs; and when the crisis was passed, they found themselves what they had been before—poor creatures. Your Camille Desmoulins, for example, may I say, was nothing: a straw blown by the wind [*but what a wind, M. Renan!*], a giddy thing, a glorified street-boy, a brainless creature carried away by the madness of the moment . . . Two or three years, then, made a man a great writer; the terrible gravity of events made him a genius for a few months. Then, abandoned by the intellect that had sustained them, they were left, without strength, to recommence life. Their literature, in general, is very weak. They write ill; and—which is strange in men of their convictions—they write pretentiously. A person who sought to collect their works would find himself face to face with Nonentity. To say the truth, their works are—the Revolution . . . The worst enemies of the great men of such a time are those who would raise them into the category of ordinary great men . . . They were not great, only the doers of a great deed . . . We love them, on condition of their being the last of their school.

A writer of the Revolution, by whom the Revolution was only indirectly influenced, was Bernardin de St. Pierre (1737–1814). Returning from an unsuccessful attempt to settle in Mauritius, he entered the literary life of Paris in 1773, and became an intimate of Jean Jacques, with whose devious character he had points of sympathy, though not with its morbid irritability and disorder. After two works not now much heard of, he produced (1788) his *Paul et Virginie*, that familiar idyll of creole romance. The rhythmic style, and the sentimental pathos of the pretty story, suited the times, and fifty editions of the book were sold as fast as they could be printed. The names of the two unfortunate young people were given to thousands of infants in the very city where, three years later, the prison-massacres of September, 1792, took place. A second venture in the humanitarian direction, *La Chaumière indienne*, in which the author extols the charitable conduct of an outcast, was equally popular in that strange time. Whatever be our judgment as to the sincerity of author or reader, we can still agree with the judgment that was passed upon the beautiful style of these books. Mr.

Saintsbury, with his usual discrimination, draws attention to their very remarkable faculty of word-painting and their influence on the feelings.

Restif de la Bretonne (1734-1806) has been called *Le Rousseau du ruisseau*; he was another follower of Jean Jacques, less successful in catching the elegance of his master, but with more reality than Bernardin.

More original was the younger brother of the author of *Soirées de St. Pétersbourg*. Xavier de Maistre (1763-1852) was an officer in the Piedmontese army when he wrote his celebrated *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, published in the terrible year 1794. Though only the pastime of a short imprisonment, this is admittedly a masterpiece, and has always been a favourite, both with the French and with foreigners. His epitaph on himself shows that Xavier was far from sharing his brother's confident dogmatism—

Ci-gît—sous cette pierre grise—
Xavier, qui de tout s'étonnait,
Demandait d'où venait la brise,
Et pourquoi Jupiter tonnait.

Comte de Volney (1757-1820) was author of a semi-historical work, more inspired by Montesquieu than by Rousseau, called *Les Ruines*; he deals with the chronology and ancient history of the Levant with acute observation and in vivid language.

A little later appeared Germaine Necker (daughter of the Minister and writer on finance mentioned in the last chapter), who became so famous under the name of her Swedish husband, Baron de Staël-Holstein. Her mother was the beautiful and intelligent Suzanne Curchod, loved of the unworthy Gibbon. Born in 1766, and brought up in the shifting social scenery of pre-Revolutionary Paris, the lively young creature announced her early proclivities by her *Letters sur le caractère et les écrits de Rousseau* (1788), and hotly proclaimed her allegiance to the departed master. But for Germaine as for others, the

literary influence of Jean Jacques passed away. In 1796 she produced a book on the influence of the passions, in which she speaks in her own voice. We hear no more the half-emancipated maiden mouthing her second-hand sentiments in assumed conviction, the intelligent young scholar who guessed at a world she could not know, and mimicked to the amusement of her seniors her weary master's answers to the gravest questions. Instead of this we find a woman of thirty, who has discovered within her and around the truths she endeavours to describe. The tone of the book, indeed, is utilitarian rather than abstract; perhaps it may be none the worse for that. Being driven by an unhappy marriage to seek a satisfaction in glory which she could not find in home, she became a real literary force in what was a feeble time. Her novels, *Delphine* and *Corinne*, are still accepted as engaging pictures of passion, full of colour and expression; but many eyes have moistened over them that have not recognised under the apparent counterfeit a suppressed image of the writer's own sorrows. Madame de Staël's calmer and wiser mood is shown in her book on Germany, published in 1817, not long before her death.

Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) is an author whose name is suggested by that of the lady of whom he was the friend and countryman. He was the ablest controversialist among the *doctrinaires*, as the ultra-royalists of the Restoration styled the followers of Montesquieu, and the founders of the monarchy of July. He wrote a number of political pamphlets which have been collected and republished as a *Cours de politique constitutionnelle*; and amongst his philosophical treatises the one on Religion is original and suggestive. His romance, *Adolphe* (1816), anticipated the more recent school of analytic fiction. Constant is not now much reprinted or read; but he enjoyed great repute in his own time; and the various directions in which he has influenced later thought warrant the notice here taken of a man who, as a mere writer, had no very great distinction.

The Parliamentary light of the *doctrinaires* was Royer-Collard (1763–1846). In his treatment of juristic subjects he appears as the disciple of Maine de Biran (1766–1824), who, though taking no active part in politics, influenced some of his contemporaries by his writings. We are now, however, in rather the dotage than the Age of Reason; as the Regency, just a century before, had seen the extinction of the Age of Glory.

[*Note on Courier.* In comparing Paul Louis with the earlier Sydney Smith of *Peter Plymley's Letters*, one ought to say that the resemblance is probably due to a similar literary ancestry. The quality common to the French farmer and the English divine is that of perception carried out in clear language. They see the ridiculous relations of small things—a lesson learned from Rabelais, and, above all, from Juvenal. For proof of this one may refer to nearly all of the writings of Courier on political subjects. There is none of that persuasive rhetoric, glowing with a steady illumination of generalised thought, that one sees, for example, in the writings of Edmund Burke. All is detail, sparkle, and banter. Take the following from the *Pamphlet des pamphlets*, the last thing he wrote before being murdered (as he more than once foretold he would be) by the victims of his pen:—

En France vous êtes tous honnêtes gens, trente millions d'honnêtes gens qui voulez gouverner le peuple par la morale et la religion. Pour le gouverner on sait bien qu'il ne faut pas lui dire vrai. La vérité est populaire, populace même, s'il se peut dire; et sent tout à fait la canaille, étant l'antipode du bel air, diamétralement opposée au ton de la bonne compagnie. Ainsi le véridique auteur d'une feuille ou brochure un peu lue a contre lui, de nécessité, tout ce qui ne veut pas être peuple; c'est à dire tout le monde. Chacun le désavoue, le renie. S'il s'en trouve toujours néanmoins, par une permission divine, c'est qu'il est nécessaire qu'il y ait du scandale. Mais malheur à celui par qui le scandale arrive, qui . . . dit au public la vérité! En France excommunié, maudit, enfermé par faveur à sainte-Pélagie: mieux lui vaudrait n'être pas né. Mais

c'est là ce qui donne créance à ses paroles—la persécution. Aucune vérité ne s'établit sans martyrs—excepté celle qu'enseigne Euclide.

We see that there is no argument here, yet the biting irony galls the adversary with minute envenomed wounds, and humiliates where it does not convince. Take, as another instance, such a passage as this from the not very dignified remonstrance on the rejection of the author's candidature by the Academy of Inscriptions:—

Ce qui me fâche le plus c'est que je vois s'accomplir cette prédiction que me fit autrefois mon père: *Tu ne seras jamais rien*. Jusqu'à présent je doutais (comme il y a toujours quelque chose d'obscur dans les oracles), je pensais qu'il pouvait avoir dit: *Tu ne feras jamais rien*; ce qui m'accommodait assez, et me semblait même d'un bon augure pour mon avancement dans le monde; car en ne faisant rien je pouvais parvenir à tout, et singulièrement à être de l'Académie. Je m'abusais. Le bonhomme sans doute avait dit (et rarement il se trompa): *Tu ne seras jamais rien*; c'est-à-dire tu ne seras ni gendarme, ni rat de cave,¹ ni espion, ni duc, ni laquais, ni académicien. Tu seras Paul-Louis pour tout potage, i.e. rien. Terrible mot!]

¹ *Rat de cave*, custom-house clerk, tide-waiter.

CHAPTER VII

THE AGE OF 'NATURE'

THE Age of Reason lasted from the death of Louis XIV to the Restoration. Then the impulse of Malherbe and Boileau, which had been carried on by J. B. Rousseau and Voltaire, came to an end. Soon after the political Revolution it became apparent that one of the great periodical breaks of continuity in thought and art was at hand.

One of the most thoughtful of French critics has recently reminded us that it is only in comparatively modern times that the word 'Nature' has assumed a sense opposed to that of 'Man.' In the days when Boileau legislated for the French Parnassus Nature included Man; and to counsel a poet, as Boileau did, to 'follow Nature' was only to urge him, however superficially, to observe the manners of mankind. The further step of observing non-human phenomena is a result of the dividing process inherent in the progress of the race. As literature becomes more refined and analytic, a necessity arises for terms that mark off the living from the inanimate, the conscious from the unconscious, until a personification of 'Nature' emerges, whether the non-human order is to be deified as the kindly nurse of men, or the Gorgon 'red in tooth and claw.'

Boileau, remarks M. Brunetière, mistook the limitations of his own power for those of art. If he enjoyed the external

world, it was the enjoyment of a citizen rather than that of an artist; he sought rural delight in the gardens of Auteuil, and the fish-ponds of Baviile, with an eye always turned to the *salons* of Paris. It never occurred to him to go farther, or to make art include semi-scientific analysis, or the photographic cataloguing of inanimate objects. That element was first introduced into the arts by Englishmen. Our landscapists, from Wilson onward, have painted pictures without any attempt at human interest, and thrown as much labour into the representation of a thistle as of a sunset. Our poets have exerted themselves in similar minute details of natural description. French naturalism arose somewhat later, as the race has been always slow to break with established rules. With J. J. Rousseau, however, came an interior movement which helped the influences from without, though his peculiar character gave it a too egoistic element. At least, in the minds of the uncultured majority of Rousseau's readers, civilisation became identified with the evils of the old system. The doctrines of that system had first become commonplaces, and then exploded heresies, condemned by their results. The Restoration was an episode, alike in politics and in the arts; and, as it wore itself out, the new period definitely set in. So much seems clear; but the task becomes less easy if we undertake to give in one word that period's character and scope. Its work is scarcely yet finished, its great men are hardly all gone. We cannot even be sure that we are going to praise its best men, or to praise them for their best work. Contemporary popularity is not always the measure of ultimate fame, or even of real merit. The highest art has to educate its own public; while the possessor of an inferior talent will please his time, because he reproduces its faults, and satisfies its mediocre cravings. Some of the poets of the *Cénacle* may sink to the level of Voiture and Benserade, some two hundred years hence; and many of the Academicians of Louis Philippe's time may then have less authority than Chapelain has to-day. The utmost that we can at

present hope to do is to examine the literature of the period, in order to form a notion of the direction in which the French mind has moved.

Before 1820 the writers of the conservative side had exhausted their message. With the exception of a few aged traditionalists every one seemed to acquiesce in the work of the Revolution, and to labour in the search of salvage from the wreck of the past. The ascendancy of talent being proclaimed, an eager competition arose; in which some strove to excel by eclectic labours in all existing schools, while others, more boldly ambitious, devoted themselves to the production of novelty. The epoch resembled that of the Pleiad at the beginning of the sixteenth century, only that now the reformers had to deal with ampler materials and were furnished with keener tools.

A sincere originality and an appreciation of the changes required by the democratic movement were not however the first impulses of the new school. The inspiration came from Goethe and Schiller, from Byron and Walter Scott, above all, from Rousseau and Chateaubriand; and the audience addressed was supposed to be small, select, and cultured.

'Popularity,' they said, 'is not now awarded by the populace; the only source capable of giving it a character of extension in time and space is the approval of that refined minority which represents the civilised world. We love above all such writers as Walter Scott, who gives us our ancestors with their prejudices, as bright and noble as their plumes and their breastplates' (V. Hugo in *La Muse française*). Sentiment was not excluded from the programme. Improving upon A. Chénier's *Jeune Malade*, and *La Chute des Feuilles* by Millevoye, the young writers produced the *Sick Sister*, and the *Dying Mother*; until an aggrieved critic declared that the series of pharmaceutic poetry must positively close with the *Uncle-by-marriage doing as well as can be expected*.¹

¹ 'L'oncle à la mode de Bretagne en pleine convalescence.'

But out of all this effervescence a more sincere and serious spirit was soon to emerge. The influence of Courier and Benjamin Constant, of Royer-Collard and Nodier, above all perhaps of the eloquent Chateaubriand, could not fail to act, in the long run, upon this band of generous aspirants. Patriotism, philanthropy, philosophy, the culture of Greece and Rome, all the best elements of Catholicism, thought, and art, were acting at once on young and ardent intellects. A new Renaissance was beginning, a new Age—whether of Romance or of Realism—was at hand, to which we may perhaps safely give the name of the ‘Age of Nature.’

One of the earliest of the innovators thus inspired was Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), whose first poetical success was achieved in his thirty-first year by the publication of his *Méditations*. His family was one of rural gentlemen in Franche-Comté, and he began life in the Royal Body-Guard. Inspired by the spirit of the day, the young enthusiast wandered in Italy and the Levant, married an English wife, and passed some time in the diplomatic service, and in parliamentary work. Between 1820 and 1838 he produced his principal writings—charming metrical compositions full of an almost feminine grace and suavity—which took great hold of the public in his day; at the same time the novelty of the style, and the attention to what has been since called in English ‘word-painting,’ vexed the judgments of the academic critics who were still the recognised authorities. The author has left an amusing account of the remonstrances uttered by the first publisher to whom he carried the *Méditations*.

Your verses [said the worthy man] resemble nothing that is received and valued in French poetry. There is no telling where you got such ideas and such language. I should do you an injury if I undertook to publish the volume at my own expense.

The fact was that the young author was more a disciple and less original than he supposes the publisher to think him. But instead of following M. Delille, or M. Fontanes, or any

of the accredited lights of the Restoration, he had taken the English Byron as his leader and example. The leading doctrine of that school was one taught more in practice than in precept. While affecting great respect and admiration for the classical writers of the Queen Anne period, Byron was by temperament and education ill-fitted to write like them. He accordingly fell back in his practice on the delineation of 'Nature.' Moreover, his own taste joined with the taste of the public in demanding some human interest in the scenery described; and as Byron's genius was not dramatic, he was led to dwell on the more superficial aspects of humanity. Now, it is not *that* part of humanity which is in antithesis to Nature; on the contrary, the instinctive and animal part of man is felt to be natural, and—in common with other elements of the phenomenal world—to require control from the higher faculties of reason, conscience, and the like. Hence in Byron we find that Nature is made to include Man, but Man personified in all his wayward moods, ignoring Man in general, and all his nobler attributes. The same combination will be found a characteristic of the Romantic School, which Byron helped to found, and which became an easy gradient whereby its pupils passed to Realism. Discontented with the Present, and not finding satisfaction in the Past, some turn for consolation to the Future, which they cannot indeed know, but which they may help to form.

The most dazzling name of the post-Napoleonic period has been already mentioned, in connection with the *Muse française*, the periodical in which the young France of the Restoration expressed that reaction which was to end in ultimate revolt. Victor Hugo (1802-1885) is the Voltaire of the nineteenth century. He reminds us of his predecessor in the precocity of his first efforts, the fruitful vigour of his prolonged old age, the multifariousness of his endeavours, and the great bulk of his achievements. Where, however, he differs from his prototype, it is not always to his advantage. Voltaire had an evident superiority in the qualities that make a writer

'classic.' Hugo was equal to Voltaire in warm and generous philanthropy, and a readiness to incur exile and the frowns of power; he was superior to him in energy, and occasionally in daring deviation from the beaten paths of literary tradition. But he lacked the good sense, the artistic judgment, the wit, the humour, the sense of measure, and workmanlike skill, which hardly ever deserted the earlier writer.

Hugo's artistic life began while he was yet a boy: 'The marvellous child!' cried Chateaubriand. At the age of twenty he published his first collection of odes, some of which were written when he was fifteen. The *Odes et Ballades* came in 1824. All this early work—what he lived to call his 'cavalier poetry'—was of the kind one would expect from the writer of the articles in the *Muse*, of which something has been already said. There was rebellion, but it was in the interest of the remote past; there was originality, but it was of the kind known in France as *voulu*, and always saturated with his own personality. About the year 1827 Hugo appeared as the leader of a new movement. Many a ballad of that time (see *Les Orientales*) shows a peculiar skill in versification. In the *Fantômes*, of the same period, we find a sincere love of children, which could have had no conventional source. There are few things which recommend themselves less than infancy to a young bachelor.

We must not loiter among these spring flowers, but pass on to the later—not always better—productions of the great modern Frenchman. Under the monarchy of 1830 Hugo became a member of the Academy, and of Louis Philippe's House of Peers; but no considerable literary work was produced by him during those years, except a series of dramas. In 1851 he was exiled for opposition to the Bonaparte restoration. The opposition, however, was not based on royalist grounds; the poet having by that time become a warm supporter of democracy. In 1853 his defiance of the existing order was expressed in a series of poems, mostly political, called *Les Châtiments*; and for the rest of his life—prolonged

too much, perhaps, for the best interests of his fame—he continued to produce prose romances, and didactic poems. It is impossible, in the present volume, to attempt an appreciation of the whole of this work. From 1817, when he was first mentioned at the Academy, to the very end of his long life, Hugo was always publishing something, and a posthumous collection of poetry has recently appeared. In the opinion of the best native critics, all is marked by power; but the power is by no means equal. As his life wore on, his writing became diffuse and prolix, the thought grew more obscure, the style developed mannerism. In his dramatic works there is always distinction, though few of them are good acting plays; and his faults, evident from the first, end in causing irritation. The author is not impersonal, as a great dramatist is bound to be; the hand of the showman is seen unconcealed among the puppets. Hugo abuses the effect of contrast until it is discovered to be a mechanical contrivance, of which we first become weary and then almost ashamed. From the combined action of these two causes, the drama of Hugo runs into the mould of the old Moralities, where personified vices and virtues take the place of real characters and human agents. If we ask: What is Cromwell? the author of the unplayable play on that subject answers, 'A sort of Tiberius-Dandin.' Take up another: What is *Marion de Lorme*? 'A woman of bad character,' we are told, 'whom love redeemed.' What is *Lucrèce Borgia*? 'Maternity purifying moral deformity.' Such is Hugo's method described by himself; not, it need hardly be added, the method of Shakspeare or Molière. Finally, in most of his plays, while the purity, joined to the combative element of the author's character led him to banish the immoral tone which was so prevalent in the theatre of his time, he was brought, probably by the same pugnacity, to give every undue prominence to physical and mental monsters.

His prose romances, with like peculiarities, have been more popular than his writings for the stage. *Hernani*, no doubt,

produced a mighty commotion at its first appearance, for it was much opposed by the Academicians, and was regarded on all sides as the manifesto of a new and audacious movement. But there was something alike in the defects and merits of the author, which rendered his genius more suited to the reader than the spectator. The vast extent of the surface of his knowledge, the warm and constant excitement of his manner, his love of tirade and rhapsody, a boundless wealth of eloquent language, were unfortunately combined with a love of ultra-realism, and the representation of irrelevant, and often impossible, details. In *Les Misérables*, for example, we have the well-known description of the battle of Waterloo, containing all these qualities, good and bad, in riotous profusion. There is nothing better in its way than the glittering picture of the advance of a mass of devoted horsemen:—

The English infantry heard the rising of this human tide. It heard the growing of the noise of three thousand horses, the alternating and symmetric beat of horse-shoes in full trot, the shaking of the breast-plates, the clashing of the sabres, and a sort of deep ferocious breathing.

But then begins the absurdity. After going on to say that a third of the charging brigade disappeared before reaching the English position, falling one rank on another into a hollow road, the author proceeds to relate the prodigious exploits of valour performed by the survivors:—

Their big horses drew themselves together, plunged into the ranks, leapt over the bayonets, and fell gigantic into the midst of those living walls. The bullets made holes in the cuirassiers, the cuirassiers made breaches in the squares, the bayonets thrust themselves into the bodies of these centaurs. [Three squares were broken and destroyed. The square on the right of the British line was detached from the rest, exposed on all four sides. Upon a drum, in the exact centre, was seated the regimental piper], with his pibroch under his arm, piping distractedly with a melancholy eye, full of the memory of the lakes and forests, and thinking of Ben Lothian. [But such was the incredible courage of those armour-

plated heroes that even these desolating sounds were unable to restrain their onset or appal their nerves.] The sabre of a cuirassier, dashing down the pibroch and the arm that held it, stopped the strain.

It would be difficult to conceive a better example of the pseudo-graphic in literary art than the latter portion of this description. The approach of the heavy horsemen is well-conceived, no doubt, and not untrue; for no language could exaggerate the grand behaviour of the French cavalry on that dreadful day. But all the rest is false, and false in a way for which there is no excuse. The author of a historical romance is, of course, at liberty to select, perhaps even to invent, his details. But so to describe an actual scene of which there were still (in 1862) numerous living witnesses was a flight of audacious fancy as rash as it was unnecessary. The words 'pibroch' for bagpipe, 'Ben Lothian' for a Highland mountain, could only proceed from an author who, in another 'historical novel' calmly told his readers that a 'Wapentake' was an English official, and who offered 'Tim-Tom-Jack' as a typical English name.

Yet Hugo has the command of lofty denunciation, joined with a power of piercing pathos; a combination in which he has no equal in French, no superior elsewhere. In the estimate of his style, one experiences a difficulty. On the one hand, even a foreigner feels that Hugo produces effects which are new, complete, and irresistible. On the other, it is known that French readers have complained that in doing this he has sadly strained his instrument; and that, in his later works at least, he is often verbose, and sometimes unintelligible. We feel therefore obliged to conclude that he is a daring and powerful innovator, who must be rather admired than followed.

A more direct precursor of the realistic generation, though of a far more impersonal type, is Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850). A critic, writing of one of Hugo's earlier volumes, said that it was proof of a singular talent to have interested French

readers in a poem, where every element but the human was included. 'It must have required a multiplicity of resources and unforeseen secrets to conceal through four thousand verses the total absence of heart and mind.'¹ Far different was the method of Balzac. Unable to compose a play or write a line of verse, with no talent for improvisation, he wrote slowly, corrected fastidiously, and was over thirty years old before he produced a readable story. This was the now celebrated *Peau de Chagrin*, in which machinery borrowed from mediæval magic was applied to the habits of modern life. Then followed the long series of the *Comédie humaine*, a second social world, with more light and shade than that of actuality, and a population much cleverer but scarcely less vividly real. People of all classes started into life; something of the conviction of a dreamer was communicated by the author. His very tediousness is interesting, if only by its sincerity. Balzac wrote laboriously; like the North British editor of myth, he 'joked wth difficulty'; was most costly to print, for his endless alterations in proof; and is said never to have made more than £500 a year by his books. But he stands out, among even his greatest contemporaries, for the sincerity of his observation, and reproduction of what he observed. Like a *camera obscura* his solitary mind took in the passing incidents of the moving various world of man, and printed them in startling unfamiliar resemblance. The lights are too high, the shadows are too deep, the whole picture is out of focus; and much of the ultimate result is as disappointing as in Hugo's case. Minuteness of detail had to take the place of classic abstraction; though it was applied to the works of man, rather than to the world of Nature. Local colour and costume had to be preserved, at the expense of a study of inward effort. Deformity was glorified; vice, ugliness of mind and body were reproduced both by him and by Hugo. Quasimodo, Borgia, L'Homme qui rit, competed for the notice of the public with the Rubemprés, and the daughters of Père

¹ Gustave Planche.

Goriot, and the father of Eugénie Grandet. The literary revolution had its '93. The reign of law was suspended: it is not yet restored.

Alfred de Musset was the Camille Desmoulins, the inspired Gavroche, of this literary movement. If Balzac is a contrast to Hugo in the lateness of his commencement, Musset is not less unlike him in the duration of his career. Hugo outlived some of his power, Musset left off working before he died, and died before he had well reached the *mezzo del cammin*. He was born 1810 and died 1857, worn out by every kind of excess, and having ceased to do good work for years. Musset has not the force and fire of Hugo, but he is without his attitudes and affectations. If he lacks the minute certainty of Balzac, he also lacks his slowness. He is spontaneous, witty, subtle: those who are in full sympathy with him would put no contemporary name above Musset's. And not only is his poetry full of impulse and youthful 'malice,' it is also free from the faulty elements of Realism. 'Moral,' in the English sense of the word, it cannot be called; but man's mind is shown at work, neither subordinated to inanimate nature, nor wholly hidden under animal existence. There is sincere feeling, and it is uttered with the lyric cry. The description of the pelican feeding its young (in the *Nuit de Mai*) is in the highest style of imaginative art. Musset's dramatic work, too, is at once pathetic and witty to a very high degree. These works show no sign of growing old-fashioned. The poet was in our own day a public favourite, and a statue in honour of him was lately raised in Paris, his native city. Musset is the last and greatest child of the Basoche.

Nor must we withhold appreciation of the massive and genial mulatto whose life coincides so closely with our own period. A true realist Alexandre Dumas (1803-70) was not; but his long semi-historical novels have delighted children of all ages, while his dramas, full of stage-interest, have been potent aids to the Romantic movement out of which Realism

has arisen. While Balzac was creating a society of bright moderns, Dumas passed his time in chronicling the adventures of an imaginary old time, with personages with real names, writing a sort of exaggerated *Waverley Novels*. He made and spent enormous sums of money, was the subject of many more or less complimentary anecdotes, and died in the terrible December when half of France was the scene of invasion and war. Dumas was master of a certain kind of dialogue, in which an appearance of sparkle was produced by the shortness of the phrases: and his long stories are read, once at least, from end to end by most of those who begin them. Prodiges of invention, and having the appearance of truthful detail so much affected by the Romantic School, these narratives excite less wonder than they once did; since it has been established that they are not so much the outpouring of genius, as the products of an ably-worked manufactory. It is really doubtful how much of the detail of the work may be due to the author whose name the series bears; a great deal being generally believed to have been contributed by Auguste Maquet, and other modest but laborious subalterns. In any case, however, Dumas deserves great credit for them, were it only for their inspiration and control. If the *Three Musqueteers*, and the rest of these works, were the product of a factory, their mere production shows what a giant the man must have been, by whom the raw material was supplied, and the work directed.

Another of the pseudo-realists was Eugène Sue (1804-57), whose big novels of incident were once so eagerly perused. The *Mysteries of Paris* and the *Wandering Jew*, in the guise of daily life, represented a sort of thieves' fairy-land in which disguised princes moved about, among burglars, murderers, and gipsies—as if the mantle of the late Bulwer-Lytton had fallen upon the editor of the *Police News*.

Almost the last of the great novelists of the time who needs to be particularly considered here was Aurore Dupin, commonly known as 'George Sand' (1804-76), an eloquent

and imaginative writer, whose popularity appears somewhat on the wane. For about ten years after 1832 she published a number of novels, which endeavoured, not without success, to interest the public in the sufferings of unappreciated females. She then retired to a country-house in Berri, where she applied herself to stories of peasant life and to botanical observation, which she introduced freely into her later works. She skimmed the plain of life, a literary Camilla; and there is little reason for either sorrow or surprise if her flight has left but little trace.

A much more important precursor of modern Realism was Prosper Mérimée (1803-70), and his contribution to the school was altogether good. To a knowledge of character, an insight into motive, and a satiric shrewdness, all of the first order, he added a deep historic knowledge and a classical severity of style. His short tales are perfect; his mediæval studies are full of life and verisimilitude; and his letters are interesting records of the observations of a cool sagacious man surveying life from a coign of vantage. He is a landmark on the way from Romanticism to Realism.

Of all the writers of the period there is none to whom the modern realists admit more obligation than Marie Henri Beyle (1783-1842) who, under the assumed name of 'de Stendhal' wrote a great number of works in fiction and criticism which had an influence on Mérimée and on others, by which he helped to stem the current of literary egotism, and turn it in the direction of true observation.

The work of Stendhal, however, was chaotic and incomplete. A more systematic critic was C. A. Sainte-Beuve (1804-69). Only partly successful in poetry and fiction, he applied himself to weekly criticism, and his 'Mondays' were long eagerly looked for, and almost universally accepted as final awards. He, perhaps more than any one other, is the originator of the method of the *milieu*, which has since been so successfully employed by M. Taine.

Through Stendhal, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, and Taine de-

scends the literary pedigree. Michelet, the Carlyle of French history (1798-1874), is a historian of the same school, though by no means free from the Romantic heresy. Of his imaginative narratives, it has been said, in language borrowed from himself, that they are less a history than a resurrection. Michelet had learned, perhaps from Thierry, who again avows his indebtedness to the *Martyrs* of Chateaubriand, that the old historic manner was worn out. Instead of telling us of 'Clovis, son of King Chilperic, and founder of the French monarchy,' Clio in her turn had to adopt the method of the *milieu*, to form the most accurate possible picture of the background, and to draw real living men and women upon it. Hugo tried this method in his *Notre Dame*, and it was carried out rigorously in the *Salammbô* of G. Flaubert (1821-81).¹ In applying the same method to religion Lamennais (1782-1854) made shipwreck of his faith. Beginning as a priest, he became in 1832 a liberal man of letters, though still professing orthodoxy. *Les Paroles d'un Croyant* was an effective rhapsody. Before his death he dropped the title of 'Abbé,' and stood forth as an irreconcilable revolutionary, both in Church and State.

Towards the end of our epoch a sort of reaction against the personal attitude set in. Novels—some of the commercial sort, made to sell, like the Jew's razors—became abundant; among the best-liked of the novel writers being Paul de Kock (a Dutchman by birth) and Paul Féval; but theirs was rather handicraft than literature. Théophile Gautier (1811-72) deserves notice as a passionate and victorious lover of many Muses. His *Capitaine Fracasse* is a clever attempt to revive the life of strolling players of the time of Louis XIII; and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, though frankly vicious in conduct, is a masterpiece of witty and polished prose; in poetry Gautier is equally remarkable; and his *Émaux et Camées*

¹ *Madame Bovary*, by the same author, is noticeable for its finished style, as also because it is the foundation stone of the modern school of Realism—indiscriminate description without due selection.

afford as good an example as can be found of flawless French verse. MM. Sully-Prudhomme, Coppée, and Leconte de l'Isle are living still, fortunately, and detailed reference to them would be out of place: it will be enough to say that they maintain the high artistic traditions of their country's literature.

Every branch of literary art is still flourishing in France; and all the paths are crowded with eager competitors. The only concern that we have with them, however, is to consider in what direction they seem to be running, and what goals they may be expected to attain. The artists themselves appear to have no misgivings on the subject; but let us hear the greatest of living French authors, who thus chastens their ardour:—

It is not healthy [says M. Renan] to talk so much of glory, or to arrogate the future to themselves with such pride of tone. The future, perhaps, will have but little time to spare for us: it will be too much occupied with itself. I fear that the modesty of our realistic authors, who tell us that they are preparing documents with the sole object of letting posterity know how we lived, will be but too well rewarded. (Speech of 21 Feb., 1889.)

In departing from the traditions of the past, the writers to whom reference is here made would probably answer that they address a public, too weary of the self-depicting practices of the Romanticists, and the votaries of Art for Art. They are constrained to meet the taste of their immediate public; 'for they who live to please, must please to live.' Yes; but what is to be thought of a public which tolerates their excesses? People must indeed be lost in sloth when they do not know one sound from another, or discriminate between the croaking of frogs in the marsh, and the song of the tree-haunting nightingale. If literary art, leaving the twin peaks of inspired verse and prose, is to cower in the caves of Pessimism, or is to leave its fine ideals, and photograph the foulest aspect of thieves' cellars, we can only repeat an ancient cry:—

The Prophets prophesy falsely . . . and my people love to have it so;

And what will be done in the end thereof?

Wisdom does not always lie in avoiding extremes, but sometimes in their combination: Idealism and Realism are both needed in a perfect human work of art; the first for selection, the second for treatment. There has been a constant danger lest this principle should escape French authors in their ardour. If Rabelais has been crudely natural, Racine has been tempted to err in the opposite direction; and the Realistic school has grown out of an impatience of the extreme artificiality of the past.

Every age is apt to quarrel with its immediate predecessor. As soon as one movement has exhausted itself, a healthy community is apt to develop another, whose main object seems to be the overthrow, if not the execration of the last. Sometimes the new-comer will seem to have its roots in the penultimate period, and to draw from the remote past an inspiration of hostility against its own immediate parent. So the Oxford Reformers of 1830 sought in the system of Laud 'something truer and deeper than what satisfied the last century.' It was out of such a border-feud that there arose the reaction of the Pleiad against the old careless ballads and fabliaux; and that of Malherbe and Boileau against Ronsard, in which latter there was even a commendation of Marot.¹ Let us hope that the next turn will be healthier and nobler than that taken by some living celebrities: lower and less pure it could hardly be. 'Forget not,' M. Renan proceeded, in the address already quoted, 'forget not that humanity, as a whole, is noble, and should be represented in its nobility. The picture of a dunghill is only justified if a beautiful flower has bloomed upon its surface. Otherwise we do not require representations of reality, we know it but too well.' Our English innovators, whether literary or political, have never aimed at those violent breaks of continuity which have been seen in France. The idea of evolution has been familiar to our race, even from a time when science had not yet given it form and demonstration. Dryden said that Milton was the

¹ 'Imitons de Marot l'élégant badinage' (*Art Poétique*).

poetic son of Spenser, as Waller was of Fairfax, the vigorous translator of Tasso. Spenser, as the same great critic points out, assumed that the soul of Chaucer had passed into himself; and Dryden claimed to have learned directly from Spenser's laborious art. If, in the eighteenth century, poetry became too much the art of a coterie, too dependent on conventional and purely decorative treatment, which unduly affected a close observation of the phenomena of scenery and even of passion, the remedy did not lie in the complete reversal of the artistic traditions. Cowper, Scott, and Southey did indeed attempt something of the sort; and they had their reward in the immediate wages of contemporary popularity. But they have now been found not to have been the greatest writers of their day: the evergreen palms have been won by those who, while giving play to impulse and sincerity, did not neglect skill and labour—Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth in his happier moments. Thus the energies of Tudor and Stuart times have been preserved without wholly sacrificing the more delicate graces of the 'Augustan Age.'

French reformers have been more thorough: in their own phrase, they 'adore what they had burned, and burn what they had adored.' Yet all analogy seems to show that the happiest progress is what grows out of the past, being modified spontaneously to meet the necessities of new surroundings.

It has been said that Chénier and Chateaubriand do not belong to the century of their birth; and such writers are, no doubt, very modern in tone. But the advantage of the classification we have adopted is, that, not being bound by the artificial limits of centuries, we have been able to assign our men to their respective schools, without neglecting either their connection with times past, or their influence on times that followed. It was not until the actual triumph of the Romantic movement, with its unhappy tendency to ultra-Realism, that we lose sight of the sane and dignified traditions that gave to French literature its characteristic value.

No doubt the Age of Glory had also its decadent tendency. A French critic (M. N. David) has gone so far as to call the disciples of Boileau 'a school of eunuchs,' and to cite the names of some modern French writers as leaders of a wholesome reaction. Among English readers the parallel will occur of the reaction against the conventional school, which began with Burns and Cowper, and is not yet at an end, despite the vigorous protests of Byron, and, in later days, of Mr. Courthope.¹ Wordsworth and Shelley completed the triumph of that reaction; but, like other English movements, it was more a reform than a revolution. In studying French seriously, one becomes aware of the intrinsic Latinity of thought and phrase, which has made it the *lingua franca* of educated Christendom. Such advantages, however, carry with them their own drawback and limitations. Gaulish *verve* requires classic discipline. Take away from the French Camenae their classic drapery, and they are apt to become Maenads in wooden shoes. French writing, from which the influence of Boileau is expelled, does not so much resemble English without Pope, as a steam-vessel without an engine. A universal comity, a cosmopolitan and cultured elegance, these are the *raisons d'être* of French literature. Victor Hugo may be as picturesque as you please, but in form he is still a particularist. His novels are translated; but his poetry, which is untranslatable, will probably never become classic, or an accepted model of national literature.

To bring these sketches to a practical conclusion, we may add a few words by way of a general summary; and thereafter terminate our study of French literature by a more detailed and technical examination of the rules which have obtained authority in the main branches of literary art.

As the French language was formed by the slow growth and confluence of surrounding elements, so also it fared with the literature of which it has been the potent and persuasive

¹ *The Liberal Movement in English Literature*. London, 1885.

instrument. In the sixteenth century, after the winter of the Middle Ages, Italian seeds were found germinating in French soil; and under the Valois kings a breath of the warm South called forth flowers hitherto unknown. Before that time, indeed, Charles d'Orléans had shown traces of his mother's nationality; but, speaking generally, the Italian standard—the standard raised by Dante, and Boccaccio, and Petrarca—was far above the reach of the semi-Teuton Franks, and the rude Gauls of that age. These, doubtless, showed a vigour of their own; but it was chiefly employed in narratives of war, stinging invective, or scenes of coarseness and sensuality. When, at last, the spirit of the Renaissance passed into France, it brought a new influence from the resuscitated culture of ancient Greece and Rome; and the dissemination of comparatively cheap copies of books, by means of the newly invented art of printing, made the middle classes participate more freely in pursuits that had hitherto been confined to the clergy and their aristocratic patrons.

Classical culture had, indeed, been always known in France, but it was for a long time confined to the learned, such as Alcuin, the English confidant and adviser of Charlemagne, who wrote many Latin books, in prose and in verse, and who occupies a creditable place in the history of European letters. The seed in his time, however, mostly fell among thorns, and he could never have foreseen much of the future. Indeed, to the very end of the dark times, and even after the reaction had asserted itself, the promise was still no more than doubtful. The Pleiad only put French culture into unnatural forms; the plants grew, as we have said, but they were tied to stiff espaliers, and torn by scholastic shears.

Under Francis I the character of the King—frivolous, licentious, and showy—was reproduced in the national literature; and the hot earnestness of the nascent revolt against Rome left the serious minds but little opportunity for introducing a deeper feeling. Then came the political struggle between authority and private judgment, and men almost ceased from

the worship of the Muses. If the gates of Janus are closed in time of peace, the fânes of Apollo are but little frequented during civil war. From Montaigne to Malherbe there is little production to show: only the stilted efforts of Du Bartas, the fiery invectives of D'Aubigné, and the *Satyre Ménippée*. At length came the compromise, typified and led by Henri IV, with time for leisure and reflection. Regnier's vigorous satire, and Malherbe's correct workmanship, are the natural products of such a time; but there is ample verge and room for more than this. The nimble wit of the Gauls turns again to foreign models. It was not to Italy, however, but to Spain that the demand for inspiration was this time addressed. In the early part of the seventeenth century an influence came from beyond the Pyrenees, which for the time affected the fashions of France as much as that which came from beyond the Alps affected it in an earlier and simpler epoch. With a saner, yet more democratic attitude, Frenchmen adopted the stately phrasing, with some of the exalted conceptions of manner and character that influenced Cervantes, even while he was pelting them most keenly with the shafts of ridicule. This element passed away, but it was revived by the Peninsular efforts of the first Empire; and traces of it are also to be found in Gautier and Hugo.

Alongside of these affectations were more spontaneous and genuine developments. The genius of the real French character—wit, neatness, symmetrical form, and urbane elegance—appeared in Malherbe, in Balzac, and in the ponderous romances of Scudéri; till these qualities combined with the better parts of the Spanish influence to produce the high-pitched and rhetorical passion of Corneille's dramas.

Later on, this apt and lively observation, failing to find sufficient matter for permanent work in the ideas of home, travelled westward under the impulse of Dubois and his Regent. The first period of Anglomania witnessed French thinkers seated in the cool and luminous school of Locke. Condillac, better known as a philosopher than as a man of letters, was never-

theless a member of the Academy in 1768. But there were other English writers whose influence was more widely felt; and other and more distinguished French writers who were almost entirely formed by that influence. Hume, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Gibbon, were among the first English authors who were acknowledged in Paris. Voltaire, in his youth, had visited England, and conversed with Bolingbroke. Montesquieu studied the British constitution; and held it up in his great political treatise, as a model for other countries.

Ere long came the turn of German literature, breaking through the night of civil war and the clouds of pedantry, in a brilliant dawn whose promise has been imperfectly fulfilled. Haller, Wieland, Lessing, were among the earlier culture-writers of Germany; and, in spite of linguistic antipathies and consequent difficulties, they were not without a certain effect on their volatile and acute-minded neighbours, who were always on the look-out for good models. Since Goethe, the literary influence of Germany has ceased.

Nevertheless, it is not to be for one moment inferred that the French intellect has been purely appreciative, or devoid of originality. It has never been entirely dependent on what it has learned from abroad, but has shown a spontaneity of its own—a twofold power, derived from width of vision, and from delicacy of touch and judgment. It has been sometimes the fashion to regard the three leading Literatures of Europe as if the German were the quarryman, the Englishman the builder, and the Frenchman at best something of a sculptor; and there is this much of truth in the comparison, that the patient labour of the first has not the same utilitarian value as the Philistine elements that have sometimes entered into the labour of the second. But the French have something that is not found in either of the other two; viz., an amiable Celtic petulance, and a sort of classic and scrupulous grace in execution. That characteristic makes them nearer descendants of the Augustan Age of Rome than the actual inhabitants of modern Italy are. In the care of their poets for

things like the *caesura*, and the alternation of rhymes, they show an artistic conscientiousness which is not found in Italian; and their prose-writers, though not wearing such very tight bandages, still move under a restraint which, if not obvious, is very real.

The more correct metaphor, therefore, may be to regard the French mind as a sort of spiritual crucible from which—heated by the fuel of good sense—thoughts and ideas, from whatever source they have been derived, come out in a clearly cut mintage of consummate precision, fit for universal circulation. The latest French literary fashion is founded on a new Anglomania. Nevertheless, if clearness and brilliancy are essential to what is to be generally current, it seems certain that, so long as this oecumenical character is to be retained, French forms and methods must continue to supply the standard of civilised literary art. It is right, however, to add that this has not always been the opinion of those best qualified to judge. Good French writers have desired a wider liberty. Not only did Hugo win some part of his fame by his license, his elaborate neglect of the *caesura*, and his audacious *enjambement*; but the elegant and scholarly Gérard de Nerval has continued in our own time an argument long ago begun by Fénelon. Writing on popular ballads—in which the observance of academic rules is not to be looked for—Gérard observes:—

Il est arrivé qu'en France la littérature n'est jamais descendue au niveau de la grande foule; les poètes académiques du 17^{me} et du 18^{me} siècles n'auraient pas plus compris de telles inspirations que les paysans n'eussent admiré leurs odes, leurs éptres, et leurs poésies si incolores, si gourmées.

Since these words were written Democracy has made great strides, and the literary knowledge, once not possessed by every statesman, has become the possession of many, who have neither leisure nor training for its judicious employment. The result of this will apparently be to make literary products

simpler and more spontaneous: but it must be remembered that, after all, Literature is an art, and Art must always be artificial and obedient to rule. The first to revolt against this principle in modern times was J. J. Rousseau; and he did not rebel so much against the forms of established art as against its substance. 'You make one want,' said Voltaire to him, 'you make one want to go on all fours.' Rousseau was the orator of an infant democracy, arguing rather than sincerely believing that Man was a blasphemous traitor to the Kingdom of Heaven, when he sought to develop the materials supplied him, by the aid of the faculties with which the divine economy had endowed him. The idea was followed up by Bernardin de St. Pierre; and the cockney Dorat—the Ovid of the Boulevards—constantly introduces the praises of Nature and Nature's children into his highly artificial poems. Then came two or three English authors, with many points of difference, but all agreed in extolling the worship of this new divinity, that

never did betray

The heart that loved her.

One would have thought that it must have sometimes happened to Wordsworth to think of the innocent vine-dressers on the slopes of Vesuvius. They trusted 'Nature,' and built their huts upon the sunny declivities, but how was their trust repaid?

The same fanaticism runs through Shelley's *Alastor*, and is taken by Byron as an admitted commonplace and starting-point.

Now the slavish flatterers of 'Nature' are not content with adulation of sea and sky, of treacherous mountain or quaking earth-crust; but they go on to assume that natural man, too, is beautiful and to be imitated in his 'natural' character, while he becomes altered and sophisticated for the worse when he departs from it. Here at least one would have thought that the logic of facts would have silenced them. Whatever might be thought of 'unbetraying' Nature as

revealed in the tempest, the volcano, the pestilence, or the earthquake, in no case could the praises of 'Nature' as exhibited in man resist the first contact with savages and cannibals—witness the experiences of Captain Cook and La Pérouse. But no; the paradox of Rousseau, the naturalism of Wordsworth, the cynicism of Byron, the melancholy of Shelley and Lamartine, the quasi-realism of Hugo, all seem to have led us at last to Maupassant and Zola, and to those writers who despise selection, and to whom every fact is as good as another. These are now the favourite writers of the land of Pascal and Molière, of Voltaire and Chateaubriand. Yet it is safe to predict that it is not by such as these that the fame of their country's literature will be maintained. Arising out of an over-ardent assertion of the doctrine 'Art for Art'—which, no doubt, conveys an indisputable truth—developed in the Romantic reaction (which was, itself, a precipitate development of good foreign ideas, the movements of Goethe and Scott), the Realistic system is becoming hostile to the essential principles of pure French art. Those principles led to certain established methods,—a mildly sarcastic social view; a geniality sometimes coarse but never indiscriminate; above all, a vigilant care for style and finish. All this, indeed, is far from natural. It is humane, it is urbane, it is sometimes elevating, always entertaining, and even consolatory, but it is not attained by a careless following of Nature.

Nature is not at all urbane, nor even humane. She is indifferent, like clay in the hand of the potter, destined to uses of honour or dishonour, according to his pleasure and his skill. Art is the director of the factory, who gives the best materials to the best workmen, so that they may, in the beautiful words of Bacon, 'conform the shows of things to the desires of the mind.'

Thus, in every direction, the student of French literary Art is driven back to the same point—disciplined selection. The French language, with all that is best and richest in it, is itself a product of selection. In its noblest literature we

find an instinctive choice of what is useful and elevating, and by consequence the rejection of what is foul and base.

We have seen the criticism passed on the literature of modern France by one of its most distinguished men, the learned and freethinking Renan. On the orthodox side its condemnation is no less strong.

'What,' asks Pastor de Pressensé, 'is the cause of the deterioration of literary fiction in France? To a large extent it is the attempt, so common of late, to describe what is called "high life," with rhapsodies over its luxury and elegance . . . Of two novels which are said to be "the success of the day" . . . we may say broadly that the very elements of morality are absent.'

Here the Reverend Pastor points out the moral evils of what was condemned by the agnostic man of letters, on grounds of general unfaithfulness and imbecility. Unselected subjects, described in vulgar slang, and treated in a manner provocative of prurience and cynicism—this is what is extolled as *fin de siècle* by the inhabitants of the country of Hugo, who speak the language of Pascal, Fénelon, and Racine!

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE SOURCES OF MODERN FRENCH LITERARY ART

(Poetry)

HAVING thus catalogued the various epochs, and taken brief note of their influential men, it only remains to enquire what, among the movements and products of the past, has chiefly contributed to form the present. And in so doing we shall find it best to confine our enquiry to imaginative work, because it is there that the practice of literature as an art is chiefly to be seen. In serious prose, no doubt, art goes for something, but it is not the main object. A scientific treatise or a system of philosophy will make its way, among the classes to whom it is particularly addressed, without help from art; but without art a poem or a work of fiction is lost.

French literary art begins with the organisation of the literary language by Boileau and the Academy. Before that date the fortunes of the Muse in France were hardly to be foreseen. If 'Marotism,' for instance, had taken root, how different an aspect would she now be wearing! It is therefore from the time which we have called 'The Age of Glory' that the influences are to be traced which have led to the best modern *technique* in France.

Victor Hugo may be regarded as the climax of his country's literary art. Reformer, even rebel that he was, he could not have made his great reputation, unless he had used the language of his predecessors, and studied their methods. He has

reached the highest mark, according to the popular standard, in the main fields of artistic literature; and, in so doing, he has proved himself the legitimate descendant and heir of the great French authors of the past. In *Hernani* he walks in the ways opened by Corneille; in his greater philosophical and narrative poems he follows—even while appearing to disown—the examples of Malherbe and Boileau, and J. B. Rousseau. In his prose romances he remains, under an appearance of originality, a fellow-craftsman of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Beyle, and Balzac. Or, to change the metaphor, in the best literary art of the nineteenth century we find something like a great river which has several tributaries, no one of which does it seem to resemble, yet all of which are necessary to its existence.

The better to understand how the conservative character thus created was maintained by such an innovator as Hugo, it will be well to observe the mechanism of the French Alexandrine, or heroic couplet; for that has been at once the vehicle of the nobler French drama, and of almost all the serious poetry of France; and Hugo really developed its resources.

The idea of the French Alexandrine is taken from the trimetre iambic verse of the Greek tragedians. We have seen in a few early specimens that the laws of this system were not acted on with regularity before Malherbe, nor formulated before Boileau. Let the 'legislator of Parnassus' explain this in his own words:—

Durant les premiers ans du Parnasse françois
Le caprice tout seul faisait toutes les lois,¹
La rime, au bout des mots assemblés sans mesure,
Tenait lieu d'ornements, de nombre et de césure.

Enfin Malherbe vint, et le premier en France
Fit sentir dans les vers une juste cadence,

¹ Not a good rhyme to modern ears.

Par ce sage écrivain la langue réparée
 N'offrit plus rien de rude à l'oreille épurée;
 Les stances avec grâce apprirent à tomber,
 Et le vers sur le vers n'osa plus enjamber.
 Tout reconnu ses lois, et ce guide fidèle
 Aux auteurs de ce temps sert encor de modèle:
 Marchez donc sur ses pas.

In regard to these 'laws,' Boileau was prevented by his way of writing from giving all the details, and for the most part contented himself with referring the student to the example of Malherbe. One rule, however, he laid down in his most felicitous manner:—

Ayez pour la cadence [he includes 'la césure'] une oreille sévère;
 Que toujours dans vos vers le sens, coupant les mots,
 Suspende l'hémistiche, en marque le repos.

From the precept and example of Boileau, then, we learn to see how much more artificial a thing French poetry is than the most elaborate work of any English writer.

(1) The line is of six feet, not five as in the English heroic metre.

(2) The line is divided by the *caesura* into two equal parts, and each couplet must be complete in meaning.

(3) The otherwise mute vowel *e* at the end of a word counts as a syllable, as in our Chaucer.

(4) A word so terminated is therefore a sort of dissyllable, in which there must be an assonance on the penultimate. This is what in French prosody is called 'a feminine rhyme,' and a couplet so terminated must alternate with one ending in consonants, which is 'a masculine rhyme.'

(5) Rhyme is the more perfect the more the resemblance between the sounds that form it: therefore the greatest perfection of rhyme is when the syllables are not only formed with the same vowels, but when these vowels are preceded by the same consonants. These are called 'rich rhymes,' and they are illustrated in the above extracts by

tomber	}	masculine rhymes.
enjamber		
fidèle	}	feminine rhymes.
modèle		

A moment's reflection will show that these rules are not only neglected in English, but are for the most part alien to the genius of our verse.

With the exception of Drayton's *Polyolbion* there is no great, or even considerable, English poem in iambic trimeter; and Drayton's *Polyolbion* has something awkward in its rumbling harmonies, which has kept it from the popularity due to its many beauties. Where a Frenchman writes 'Je chante le héros qui régnait sur la France,' an Englishman begins his incomparably grander poem with 'Of man's—first disobedience and—the fruit.'

In Milton's line, moreover, there is no appreciable or obligatory *caesura*; nor, obviously, can a line of five feet ever be cut into two equal parts. In fact it may almost seem as if the French Alexandrine, as contemplated by Boileau, were composed of *two* short lines, so that one of his lines might be written like the first couplet of the stanza of some of our old ballads, or in some of the 'old version' of the *Psalms*:—

To bless Thy chosen race,
In mercy, Lord, incline.

The use of the final *e* as a syllable in poetry is observable in Chaucer and his contemporaries. But the alternate rhyming had not then been introduced in French, and so there was, naturally, no occasion for it in English, where it is now unknown, except in some past participles.

The 'rich rhymes' of the French are absolutely forbidden in our poetry. The only instance that occurs to memory is in Lord Tennyson's suppressed sonnet on Poland:—

Blow ye the trumpet: summon from *afar*
The hosts to battle; be not bought or sold;

Arise, brave Poles—the boldest of the bold—
Break through your iron shackles, fling them far.

Taking Hugo as a type of French poetry, we find all these rules followed in his earlier and better work. Only in the assumed freedom of his older years, when fame had made him confident, did he violate the laws of the *caesura* and the *enjambement*. This latter term means, as above said (2) that the sense, after rising and falling like a wave through the four hemistiches, must come to a pause, and not overlap into the couplet that follows. In English verse this rule, observed by Pope and Byron, has been broken by Keats with a happy audacity.

So much for the mechanism of French heroic metre, and its chief difference from ours. It may be added that in lyric poetry other forms are allowed, but they are subject—as far as possible—to the same laws. Malherbe, Boileau, J. B. Rousseau, La Fontaine, and many others, have written short pieces in lines of fewer than six feet; and here too they have been followed by Hugo and other recent authors. A sample of Malherbe's ode-writing has been already shown; many others may be found in his works. Here is a prettily-turned trifle:—

SUR MDLLE DE BOURBON.

N'égalons pas cette petite
Aux déesses que nous récite
L'histoire des siècles passés,
Tout cela n'est qu'une chimère,
Il faut dire—pour dire assez—
Elle est belle comme sa mère.

Boileau's lyrics lack this neat lightness of touch. His 'Ode on the taking of Namur,' so much admired at the time (1693), is in the worst style of pseudo-classicism, like the contemporaneous statues of the Grand Monarch. It was reserved for Rousseau to show the high level of possibility in serious lyrical verse; and with the exception of Chénier there was

probably no better work of that kind produced in French up to the first quarter of the present century. The amount of his work is considerable, and there is something virile in his sentiment, which, with a brilliant antithetic style, stamps him as original.

Nevertheless, the heroic couplet is the characteristic metre of the best French poetry, and in this all its important work has been done. Especially is it the metre of the drama. Molière and his school may be left out of consideration at present, comedy in couplets being almost without visible influence in modern French. Of wit there is still no lack, but humour—that sort of playful pity that loves what it laughs at, and is not above laughing at itself—seems to have died out of French poetry, almost out of the national mind and character. Hugo, in particular, shows none of it: he is kindly, but his kindness is never allowed to compromise his dignity.

Comedy apart, the glories of the French stage, down to the appearance of Hugo, are seen in Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire. The latter was perhaps only a dramatic author in virtue of his universality, and because of the fame of his predecessors, in which he sought to have a share. Even before Corneille there had been ambitious attempts; and the idea of a quasi-historical theatre had been borrowed from Seneca. That idea may be summed up in a classical allusion: it was the drama of the buskin and the brazen mask. Nature was to be at once enlarged, and limited. Human beings were to be seen transfigured into something more grandiose and solemn, but their adventures were to be stretched on the Procrustean bed of the 'unities.'

Mairet, according to La Harpe, was the first French dramatist who produced a tragedy conformed to these rules. His play of *Sophonisba* appeared only seven years before the *Cid* of Corneille; and the difference between the two suffices to show how great the advance that had been made in so short a time.

Those who would play at a game must obey its rules. To

enjoy the masterpieces of the French tragedians we must keep before our minds the effects which their authors undertook to produce. Mairet, and still more Tristan—the author of tragedies that were equally esteemed before the appearance of Corneille—wrote in a way that might have led to dramas like those which had then become popular in Spain and England, where pathos and humour were mingled, and the fortunes of all the characters crossed in plot and underplot, as in real life, and where the most exalted personages on the stage behaved much as people were behaving in the contemporary world.

That, however, was not the school of ‘the ancients,’ by which we mean of Seneca; for the school of Seneca was the admitted model. Allowance being made for this, the superiority of Corneille to his predecessors can be easily perceived. The ‘noble style’ was suited to the idealised characters, and to the selected situations and high-flown sentiments that were alone considered appropriate. And so a form of tragedy was created, differing indeed from that of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of Calderon, but having a distinct merit of its own—artificial but artistic, and entitled to be judged by its own laws.

‘Ignoble expressions,’ says La Harpe, ‘in the mouth of a grand personage are like rags worn by a King’ (we know what King Lear could be in rags); ‘Corneille removed the sordid wrappings which disguised Melpomene, and clothed her in a majestic robe: and if he left some spots upon it, Racine succeeded, and covered them with gold and diamonds.’

This comparison between Corneille and Racine has been drawn by several distinguished Frenchmen. To the countrymen of Shakspeare it may seem that the distinction is not wholly favourable to the later poet. And if Hugo be—as we have supposed—a type of modern French taste in art, there were in Corneille elements of greatness which the practice of Racine tended to obliterate, but which have revived in later times. The critic already cited was more enthralled by

academic traditions than the contemporaries of Hugo: though La Harpe himself has done justice to the 'naturalness' of language and feeling in *Le Cid*. What was then thought to be Nature was, however, to a great extent the mere mirage of an over-cultivated aristocracy; and, in Corneille particularly, it was not perhaps so much Nature as defective art.

The difference in Racine is not entirely one of evolution. Of course Corneille came first, and in drawing attention to decorum and elocution, he prepared men's minds for the appreciation of his successor. But it must be remembered that for nearly half a generation they were contemporary and even competitive dramatic writers. Corneille's *Othon*, and the *Alexandre* of Racine, were both produced in 1665, and the comparison, thus naturally invited among the critics of that day, has continued to our own time. Allowing for the fact that the elder poet was an originator and that the younger walked on beaten paths, it is still possible to see points of intrinsic dissimilarity; and these will be best accounted for by considering the characters of the two men. Corneille was a simple honest citizen, content with the middle station of society in which he was born, but proud and intractable, confident of his own genius, disinclined to owe anything to others, whether in the shape of patronage or advice. His characters are all of heroic and idealised proportions—in evil as in good—their sentiments are somewhat crude, and there is a tendency to rant in their language: but every now and then one sees those flashes of lightning which tell of heaven's own forces, and the general tone, however strained, is noble and sincere. Corneille is seen at his best when he leaves his classic models, and anticipates the motives and manners of the romantic school. *Le Cid* is a lineal ancestor of *Hernani*.

Turning to Racine we become aware of another class of mind. Where Corneille would place a conflict of heroic types, actuated by idealised passions and debating like Michael and Satan, we find Racine resting on the refine-

ments of 'love' and the resources of a consummate style. It was this that wrung from his older rival and precursor the allusion to

Le commerce rampant de soupirs et de flammes.

Racine's was the commoner, and the more petty character.

The consequence has been that Racine has not built so durably as Corneille did. Though a far more perfect literary artist, he was content to lay his foundations in a lighter and more superficial stratum. He had every advantage, except that of character. He was a better poet, but not so great a man; and he won the favour of a world to solicit whose favour the other would not stoop. Voltaire has put this in his own right way:—'Corneille eut à combattre son siècle, ses rivaux, et le Cardinal de Richelieu . . . mais Louis XIV, Colbert, Euripide' (he might have added 'et Corneille'), 'contribuèrent tous, à former Racine.' There is yet another helper to be named. In point of versification Racine was the scholar of Boileau; and the master and the disciple between them have fixed the standard of French versification, and made it what it is, unique among literary arts, alike in its beauties and its defects. If correctness, monotony, and a thin sweetness, as of an autumnal breeze or a fugue played on one violin, be the special characteristics of the French Camenae, then surely Racine is fit to be their high priest. We, modern Teutons—eager for the various sounds of life in our concerts, even at the risk of discord—we, whose taste admits of Browning and Walt Whitman, and some of whom can even tolerate the Salvation Army, are not, perhaps, the fittest judges of these questions.

The motive of the *Cid* is not—as Chapelain wrongly said in the report that he drafted for the Academy—the marriage of Rodrigue and Chimène: it is the crossing of their love by the quarrel between their fathers. The Count has insulted Don Diègue, Rodrigue's father, who makes his son take up his cause and avenge it. The King then consents to the combat

between Rodrigue and Don Sanche on the condition that Chimène is to marry the victor. Rodrigue—the Cid—prevails, and kills his antagonist. Chimène finds the King's orders, coupled with which are her own inclinations, opposed by the conviction that she ought to have vengeance on the Cid for the death of the Count, her father. In vain Rodrigue, falling at her feet, implores her to accept his life as the solution of the dilemma: she prefers the solution indicated in the following address to the King, which has been so highly praised by Voltaire among other less capable critics:—

Rodrigue a des vertus qui je ne puis haïr,
Et vous êtes mon roi, je vous dois obéir :
Mais, à quoi que déjà vous m'ayez condamné,
Sire ! quelle apparence a ce triste hyménée ?
Qu'un même jour commence et finisse mon deuil,
Mette en mon lit Rodrigue, et mon père au cercueil ?
C'est trop d'intelligence avec son homicide,
Vers ses mânes sacrés c'est me rendre perfide,
Et souiller mon honneur d'un reproche éternel
D'avoir trempé mes mains dans le sang paternel.

Voltaire points out how these lines make the justification of the distracted heroine. She does not consent to marry the man who has killed her father; she shows reasons why she should not. She says not to the King, 'I will obey you,' but only, 'I ought to obey you.' Yet the spectator perceives that her heart will in the end compel obedience, and this makes the beauty of the solution, hinted rather than shown.

Polyeucte is the second of what we have called the romantic dramas of Corneille. Here also there is a love conflict, with elements which the academical critics found trivial, but which have always pleased the public. He who gives the title to the piece is a noble Armenian, to whom the Roman governor, Felix, has given his daughter Paulina in marriage in spite of her love for Severus, a Roman officer. The wife is placed in difficulties by the very virtues of her husband, a devoted Christian, who incurs sentence of death by an audacious

declaration of his opinions. In her despair Paulina determines to appeal to her lover, and engage him to use his influence with her father to stay the execution of the sentence, and to recommend her husband to the mercy of the Emperor. The following lines are taken from this passage:—

Vous êtes généreux, soyez-le jusqu'au bout,
 Mon père est en état de vous accorder tout :
 Il vous craint, et j'avance encor cette parole,
 Que s'il perd mon époux c'est à vous qu'il l'immole.
 Sauvez ce malheureux, employez-vous pour lui,
 Faites-vous un effort pour lui servir d'appui :
 Je sais que c'est beaucoup que ce que je demande,
 Mais plus l'effort est grand, plus la gloire en est grande.
 Conserver un rival dont vous êtes jaloux,
 C'est un trait de vertu qui n'appartient qu'à vous ;
 Et, si ce n'est assez de votre renommée,
 C'est beaucoup qu'une femme, autrefois tant aimée,
 Et dont l'amour peut-être encor vous peut toucher,
 Doive à votre vertu ce qu'elle a de plus cher.

While Corneille was thus lavishing his mingled tissue of fustian and brocade, his young competitor was beginning to measure out his matchless fabric. It was the early noon of the *Roi Soleil*, when Racine first looked round for support. He went to Molière; the genial comedian gave him money, but was not much impressed by his work. With Boileau the young aspirant was more successful. The 'legislator,' touched with his intelligence and docility, taught Racine all he knew. Racine bettered the example, and made the most of the precepts. He decided to rise as high as his means would carry him, and to keep himself, as much as possible, on that level. There is no English author to whom he exactly corresponds; but if we say that he is to Corneille as Pope is to Dryden, we shall give a correct idea of his relative position.

Racine's work—as has been already stated—falls into three divisions: not of quality, for almost all is of equal excellence; but of kind and of time. At first, competing for public favour

as a playwright, he produced a Greek fable-series, in which, next perhaps to Seneca, he imitated Euripides. This came to a temporary end with *Andromaque* in 1667, when the poet turned for a time to historical rather than to mythological subjects. His historical drama culminated in *Mithridate* (1673). Racine then returned to mythology, producing the two masterpieces *Iphigénie* (1674) and *Phèdre* (1677). Then his Muse took a long furlough, and only returned to work for the two great dramas on tales from the Hebrew, viz. *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1690).

It is impossible to describe the whole of this fine work: all that can be undertaken is a few remarks upon the typical plays of each class. La Harpe, with the insight which, within certain natural limits, seldom deserts him, has pointed out the peculiar characteristics of Racine. They are two, *dexterity* and *reserve*; he always seems to know how much to say, and how to say it best. We shall find these two qualities as conspicuous in *Andromaque* as in *Athalie*, neither of them weaker in the opening work than in the later one, after nearly a quarter of a century of labour.

We have said something of the *Andromaque* elsewhere. In criticising a work of this sort, we must recollect that it presupposes certain postulates, which differentiate it strongly from other kinds of poetry. Here is one of them, a canon of amorous casuistry, as stated by La Harpe. 'The desire of the spectator that love may have a happy issue only arises when he is sure that it is reciprocal; because then only can it make both lovers happy.' This would exclude the love of Ophelia in *Hamlet*, and that of Euphrasia in *Philaster*; but we are here concerned with French drama alone. Nevertheless, when we concede this rule, how completely the pure and noble figure of the widowed mother takes possession of our sympathies, and how readily we see why it is Andromache who gives the piece its title and not one of the unhappy lovers. The combination of address and self-restraint in the artist is seen in the speeches that are assigned to this

tender heroine. Hear her pleading for the life of her son, offered as the price of her consenting to marry her fierce captor. Not a word of the proposal which is her true humiliation; but not a word of other resistance to his authority:—

Seigneur, voyez l'état où vous me réduisez :
 J'ai vu mon père mort, et nos murs embrasés;
 J'ai vu trancher les jours de ma famille entière,
 Et mon époux, sanglant, trainé sur la poussière;
 Son fils, seul avec moi, réservé pour les fers,
 Mais que ne peut un fils? *je respire, je sers :*
 J'ai fait plus; je me suis quelque fois consolée
 Qu'ici, plutôt qu'ailleurs, le sort m'eut exilée;
Qu'heureux dans son malheur, le fils de tant de rois,
Puisqu'il devait servir, fût tombé sous vos lois.

Here the deft dexterity is no less remarkable than the reserve; nothing, in the style with which we are dealing, can ever surpass in finish the words we have emphasised. And when, at last (since no other way remains by which she can save her boy), the much-tried woman consents—with the mental reservation to die at that altar, where she becomes the wife of her country's foe,—how touching are the words in which, with scarce a thought of self, she confides the care of Astyanax to her faithful friend Céphise!—

Fais connaître à mon fils les héros de sa race;
 Autant que tu pourras conduis-le sur leur trace;
 Dis-lui par quels exploits leurs noms ont éclaté,
 Plutôt ce qu'ils ont fait que ce qu'ils ont été.
 Parle-lui tous les jours des vertus de son père,
 Et quelquefois, aussi, parle-lui de sa mère.
 Mais qu'il ne songe plus, Céphise, à nous venger!
 Nous lui laissons un maître, il le doit ménager.
 Qu'il ait de ses aïeux un souvenir modeste,
 Il est du sang d'Hector, mais il en est le reste,
 Et pour ce reste, enfin, j'ai, moi-même, en un jour,
 Sacrifié mon sang, ma haine, et mon amour.

Such was Racine at the age of twenty-seven, determined to make no mistakes and to omit no effort. But he had been

censured for giving so much attention to matters of 'love,' the passion which is often indeed dominant in life, but which really makes but a small part of life's whole. In the new path, therefore, which Racine struck out he resolved to avoid this reproach. Two years after the appearance of *Andromaque* he produced his first play from Roman history, the title of which was *Britannicus*. In this, while giving fresh proofs of his mastery in the two qualities of address and reserve, he also showed that he could touch the springs of politics, and lay bare the subtler workings of the human heart. There is still a love-plot, the innocent engagement of the maiden Junia with the Emperor's virtuous brother Britannicus; but the chief interest lies in the development of Nero's cool unscrupulous wickedness, never shown by the conventional spouting of a stage villain, yet perceived almost from the first, and gradually working on to the catastrophe. This restrained method was, for a time, unintelligible to the theatre-going public; the play was coldly received, it was found—the author observes—that Nero was too good-natured. But the success of the piece, if slow, was sure. 'It is now,' writes the author, in his preface to the second edition, 'the one of my plays to which Court and town repair the oftenest.' Voltaire called it 'the connoisseurs' piece': it was seen to owe so much to the author's invention and *technique*.

The story, as found in Tacitus, is very simple. Nero, the popular young ruler, having the good fortune to succeed Claudius, and having been carefully trained by his mother and by the noble Roman, Burrhus, passes for a most promising prince; a little too amiable, but that was a fault which time and experience would amend. The worst that could be said of him was that he had no exalted talents for government, and was content with being thought a skilful charioteer and a good musician. All are deluded, except indeed the freedman Narcissus, who recognises the inborn ferocity of the tiger-cub, and resolves to use it for purposes of his own. Agrippina, who has done so much for her son, believes in his

Et je ne prétends pas que sa coupable audace
Une seconde fois lui promette ma place.

That Nero should reason in this spirit of deadly hostility is natural; but, to paint the monster, he is shown calmly exposing his conclusion to the man of all others whose disapproval he must have foreseen. The methods and resources of the French stage, as then established, only permitted a minimum of action; the passions had therefore to be chiefly expressed in words. Let this be remembered and it will be seen that Racine, in *Britannicus*, made his means go farther and produce more effect than could have been done by any other one of his contemporaries.

Esther is a piece of a different texture. There was little or no scope for the display of passion, or the development of plot. But, here again, skill and restraint are combined; and the result is poetry of great depth and suavity, with an adroit idealisation of the then existing circumstances of the King and Madame de Maintenon, for whose entertainment the piece was composed. Racine introduced into this piece a sort of chorus, the odes of which were held by Voltaire to put their author in the first rank of French lyric poets. To an ordinary English reader this may not seem very high praise, even although it implies superiority to Rousseau: but the choral odes of *Esther* exhibit all the graces of which the rather refractory medium was capable. The French language lends itself less to lyrical composition than to most branches of the literary art. This will appear if we consider how little it has produced, and how slight has been its effect on other nations, compared with its achievements in the drama, in didactic poetry, in romance, in science, in philosophy, and historical composition. It was only by neglecting some of its laws, and using freedoms with its phraseology, that, at a much later date, Hugo and Musset were able to produce lyrics that have at all satisfied the world. The subjoined extract will serve to illustrate these

remarks, and to show the effort, and, at the same time, the incurable prosaicness of Racine's odes :—

Le Dieu que nous servons est le Dieu des combats.
 Non, non, il ne souffrira pas
 Qu'on égorge ainsi l'innocence.
 Hé, quoi ! dirait l'impiété,
 Où donc est-il, ce Dieu si redouté,
 Dont Israël nous vantait la puissance ?
 Ce Dieu jaloux, ce Dieu victorieux,
 Frémissez, peuples de la terre,
 Ce Dieu jaloux, ce Dieu victorieux,
 Et le seul qui commande aux cieus, etc.

This is not much more poetical than the *Marseillaise*, to which, indeed, it seems to present some sort of family resemblance.

Racine's last work, *Athalie*, is also his greatest. Acting on a few hints from the Hebrew scripture (2 Kings c. 11), he worked out with practised skill a drama, which Boileau pronounced to be its author's finest work ; and this, though it dispensed with love, with confidants, and with all the usual baggage of Melpomene. The plot is necessarily simple. Athaliah (called in our version the daughter of Omri, King of Israel, but here supposed the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) is the widow of Ahaziah, slain by Jehu ; and by killing as she believes all the rest of the royal family of Judah, she becomes ruler in Jerusalem. But her late husband's sister has preserved one of the sons, named Joash, and concealed him for eight years, during which he has grown up until the high-priest Jehoiada—or Joad as the drama more conveniently spells his name—determines to bring him forward to destroy the cruel female usurper, and seat him on the throne of David. From so austere a subject it was not easy to draw out five acts, for the pleasure of the French Court and public. That Racine succeeded in doing so is the last and best proof of his ability and self-command. The priest, surrounded by treacherous foes or incapable friends, relies on his God and

on the goodness of his cause. The daughter of the idolaters accepts the challenge. In a transport of mingled avarice and alarm, she looks from her palace-window at the Temple, which she believes to contain a treasure that she covets and an avenger whom she fears. This is related by Abner—

Comme si dans le fond de ce vaste édifice
Dieu cachait un vengeur armé pour son supplice.
Croyez-moi, plus j'y pense, et moins je puis douter
Que sur vous son courroux ne soit près d'éclater,
Et que de Jézabel la fille sanguinaire
Ne vienne attaquer Dieu jusqu'en son sanctuaire.

This is fine, 'to attack God, even in His holy place'! The reply of the priest is almost too well known—

Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots
Sait aussi des méchants arrêter les complots;
Soumis avec respect à sa volonté sainte,
Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte.

It may be that there is to be a conflict between the impious Queen and the God of Judah; in that case the priest is sure of his victory, for his cause is that of the Lord. He dismisses Abner without confiding to him the details of his scheme; but, willing to accept his company in the undertaking, however independent of his support, he appoints the third watch of the day for another meeting.

In the next scene we have an interview between Joad, his wife, and the young heir. Joad explains to the timorous woman something of the undertaking in which he is engaged, and the act ends with a sublime expression of devout entreaty on behalf of the prince:—

Grand Dieu, si tu prévois qu'indigne de sa race,
Il doive de David abandonner la trace,
Qu'il soit comme le fruit en naissant arraché
On qu'un souffle ennemi dans sa fleur a séché:
Mais, si ce même enfant, à tes ordres docile,

Doit être à tes desseins un instrument utile,
Fais qu'au juste héritier le sceptre soit remis :
Livre en mes faibles mains ses puissants ennemis ;
Confonds, dans ses conseils, une reine cruelle,
Daigne, daigne, mon Dieu ! sur Mathan et sur elle !
Répandre cet esprit d'imprudence et d'erreur
De la chute des rois funeste avant-coureur.

The second act shows the commencement of the war. Breaking into the temple of Jehovah, Athaliah disturbs the sacrifice of 'first-fruits,' which in her double capacity of woman and of alien she was bound to respect. Abashed by the calm resistance she meets with there, the Queen next visits the priest's lodging, where she betrays the one emotion of her whole career, at the sight of the boy Joash, though she is ignorant of who he is. In the third act she is nervous and undecided, as a sort of fulfilment of Joad's prayer. The God whom she had defied already shows His power. But the idolatrous priest Mathan, who serves as chaplain and director to Athaliah, continues to sustain her rage against the followers of Jehovah, in whom he does not believe, although he declares that he would have professed to do so, had it been made worth his while. Athaliah, thus encouraged, returns to the Temple and demands the surrender of Joash, whom she only knows as the priest Eliakim, by whom she was encountered on her first visit. Joad invokes the interposition of Jehovah, and predicts the future greatness of his ward, Joash, and the third act ends. In the fourth act we see the preparations for the coronation, the swearing on the Scriptures, the girding with the sword of David, and the public recognition of the youthful prince, hitherto known to the world as the young priest Eliakim. In a long but magnificent address the high priest then points out to the new King his dangers and his duties :—

O ! mon fils, de ce nom j'ose encor vous nommer,
Souffrez cette tendresse, et pardonnez ceux larmes
Que m'arrachent pour vous de trop justes alarmes.

Loin du trône nourri, de ce fatal honneur
Hélas ! vous ignorez le charme empoisonneur :
De l'absolu pouvoir vous ignorez l'ivresse
Et des lâches flatteurs la voix enchanteresse.
Bientôt ils vous diront que les plus saintes lois,
Maîtresse du vil peuple, obéissent aux rois ;
Qu'un roi n'a d'autre frein que sa volonté même ;
Qu'il doit immoler tout à sa grandeur suprême ;
Qu'aux larmes, au travail, le peuple est condamné,
Et d'un sceptre de fer veut être gouverné ;
Que s'il n'est opprimé tôt ou tard il opprime.

.
Promettez sur ce livre, et devant ces témoins,
Que Dieu sera toujours le premier de vos soins ;
Que, sévère aux méchants, et des bons le refuge,
Entre le pauvre et vous vous prendrez Dieu pour juge ;
Vous souvenant, mon fils, que, caché sous ce lin,
Comme eux vous fûtes pauvre, et comme eux orphelin.

Disappointed in obtaining the surrender of the boy, Athaliah besieges the Temple. But its defenders, having there found a stock of weapons, are prepared to protect their young King, though unhappily deprived of the military experience of the pious warrior Abner, who has fallen into the hands of the Queen and her Phœnician mercenaries.

In the opening of the fifth act, however, Abner is sent into the Temple by the Queen, to demand for her the treasure concealed in it. Should this be surrendered with the boy, the lives of all will be spared : if not, they may expect the worst. Joad replies by inviting the Queen to enter, and see the treasure of David ; Athaliah advances, with a small retinue, not knowing that the priests are armed ; the gates are thrown open, and Joash is seen, not ' standing by a pillar,' as our version lamely says, but crowned, and seated upon the throne of David.

' God of the Jews, thou hast prevailed,' cries Athaliah, as she falls slain.

Athalie has been thus particularly analysed, for two reasons.

It is the last of Racine's dramatic writings; and it is the one where he has produced the most splendid effects, out of the scantiest and most unpromising materials. There is less reserve than usual in his pieces, but even more dexterity; and one feels that the author is the equal, in some respects the superior, of his splendid rival. If the characteristic of Corneille is careless power, tending sometimes to bombast, Racine's peculiarity is minute elaboration, owing much to ceaseless vigilance and care. *Amat victoria curam*, as Catullus has said. Racine was the winner with the Court, and the town: but it is Corneille, after all, who has exercised the deepest and most durable effect upon the literary practice of his country.

It only remains to add that, besides editions of separate plays, the complete *Théâtre* of Corneille has been often republished. A fine edition, in twelve 8vo volumes, with Voltaire's commentary, was published at Geneva in 1764. An illustrated edition appeared at Paris in 1868, with a life by Fontenelle, the poet's nephew. There have been many editions of Racine also. One, by M. Albert, as late as 1878, is in two 8vo volumes; the edition of P. Mesnard (1865-73) is in eight volumes 8vo. But it may be fairly said that the school of Racine is declining in the present day, and that the interest he still inspires is chiefly of the academic kind.

So much has been said about Voltaire in the preceding pages, and his dramatic work is so inferior to that of Corneille and Racine in spontaneity and force, that it is hardly necessary to treat of it at length, in tracing the evolution of French poetry. Like the *Henriade*, Voltaire's *Théâtre* is the *tour de force* of a very able literary man, determined to show what he can do in perfecting ancient forms and models. Nevertheless there are some among his dramas that show prodigious invention; and although the style bears frequent marks of hurry, there are numerous passages in which modern thought is expressed in tones of sincerity and wonderful charm. These beauties are especially conspicuous in *Zaire*,

a drama of the Crusades, produced fourteen years after *Œdipe*, and after many intermediate failures. The piece turns upon the love of Orosmane, Sultan of Egypt, a prince of noble and amiable character, for a virtuous and sweet-natured slave-girl, who modestly returns his passion. The girl knows that she is of Christian birth, though bred in the faith of Islam. A French knight, Nérestan, arrives to ransom her from captivity; but the Sultan not only refuses to part with his mistress and intended wife, but also exempts from the number of Christian captives whom he proposes to surrender an old knight, a member of the royal house of Lusignan. In this latter refusal, however, he yields to the prayers of Zaïre, and answers to the remonstrances of his faithful minister that it is useless to feign political objects:—

Zaïre l'a voulu; c'est assez; et mon cœur,
En donnant Lusignan, le donne à mon vainqueur.

Disregarding the laws of female seclusion, he permits Zaïre to have an interview with her captive countryman. At his command Lusignan comes forth from his prison, dazzled with the sunshine, and confused by the sudden change in his fortunes; he converses with Zaïre and Nérestan; and presently discovers that they are in truth his long-lost children. But a dreadful doubt, succeeding to the first joy, prompts the next question:—

Toi, qui seul as conduit sa fortune et la mienne,
Mon Dieu qui me la rends! me la rends-tu Chrétienne?

Alas! no; his daughter has to confess that she has been brought up in the creed of the Crescent, and a violent complaint follows from the old man; but the scene ends by Zaïre promising to return to the faith of her fathers. Later on, when Lusignan is evidently sinking under the weight of all these emotions, Zaïre, on baptism being proposed, avows that she is the betrothed wife of the Sultan, whose love she fondly returns.

Nérestan at first overwhelms his sister with reproaches, and threatens to go off to the sinking Lusignan, and disturb his deathbed with the terrible disclosure. But Zaïre appeases him with a touching apology:—

Pardonnez-moi, Chrétiens! qui ne l'aurait aimé?
Il faisait tout pour moi, etc.

The irascible brother grants the desired forgiveness, but only on the condition that his sister consents to be baptised before the proposed marriage, and to present herself before the Pope. Scarcely has Zaïre given the promise to comply with this, when the Sultan enters to announce that all is ready for their nuptials. The silence of fear, the thrill of pity, fall upon the scene; and the spectators await, with dreadful expectation, the issue of this tremendous situation. Her father, says Zaïre, is dying:—

Seigneur! si vous m'aimez, si je vous étais chère . . .
Sultan. Si vous l'êtes, ah, Dieu! . . .
Zaïre. Souffrez que l'on diffère,
Permettez que ces nœuds, par vos mains assemblés . . .
Sultan. Que dites-vous? O, ciel! est-ce vous qui parlez,
Zaïre?
Zaïre (aside). Je ne puis soutenir sa colère.
Sultan. Zaïre!
Zaïre. Il m'est affreux, seigneur, de vous déplaire;
Excusez ma douleur. Non! j'oublie, à la fois,
Et tout ce que je suis, et tout ce que je dois.

The situation cannot last: Zaïre is forced to retire. The Sultan seeks in vain to account for the change in her sentiments. Is it possible that the Christian knight has abused his hospitality to win the heart of his bride? Is Zaïre so faithless?

Non, c'est trop sur Zaïre arrêter un soupçon;
Non, son cœur n'est point fait pour une trahison.

And yet such things are said to happen in Europe; they shall not happen here:—

Ce sexe dangereux, qui veut tout asservir,
S'il règne dans l'occident, ici doit obéir.

In the fourth act the author shows Zaïre distracted between two feelings: the love of her generous master, and the attraction of her father's God, for whom, indeed, she had always a secret reverence, even before the recent events. She now resolves to sacrifice her passion and her hopes of happiness to the new-found duty and the claims of Christ, to whom she appeals:—

Ôte-moi mon amour,
Arrache-moi mes vœux, remplis-moi de toi-même;
Mais, Fatime [so she cries to her confidante], à l'instant les
traits de ce que j'aime,
*Ces traits chers et charmants, que toujours je revois,
Se montrent dans mon âme, entre le ciel et moi.*

Then, with another turn, she thinks if it can be possible to conjoin all hopes. With God all things are possible:—

Orosmane est-il fait pour être sa victime?
Dieu pourrait-il haïr un cœur si magnanime?

In an evil hour she allows her confidante to prevail over the impulse that urges her to confess all to the generous Sultan; who, in the next scene, bids her a farewell which, with a beginning of affected coldness, ends in a tender outburst. The 'Zaïre! vous pleurez' is famous in literature; it is a real stroke of nature; it is followed by 'Zaïre! vous m'aimez': to which the agitated maiden can only answer: 'Dieu! si je l'aime.' The Sultan is at first transported, but a shade returns. If she loves him, why is the marriage deferred? She endeavours to reassure him by a promise that to-morrow all shall be explained, and, for the present, she takes her leave. A reconciliation seems secure, when a servant enters with a letter from Nérestan, asking for a secret interview. Orosmane, who is still ignorant that Nérestan is Zaïre's brother, reads the letter, and feels all his jealousy rekindle: sending

the letter to Zaïre, he first orders, then counterorders the death of the Christian, and ends by having another interview with Zaïre, who has not yet heard of the fatal letter, and conjures her to tell him if she loves another, promising resignation and pardon. Zaïre, with a mixture of pride and tenderness, denies, and leaves him: and the Sultan ends the act by ordering that Nérestan is to be arrested as soon as he appears at the appointed meeting-place. In the last act Orosmane comes in the darkness where Zaïre is hastening into her brother's arms; and, as she runs to him with the cry, 'Est-ce vous, Nérestan?' plunges his dagger into her innocent breast. Such is the French *Othello*; and when we add that the play was the first (since the *Cid*) in which the times of chivalry had been reproduced, and that the old watchwords of 'Bouvines,' 'Montmorenci,' 'Melun,' 'Couci,' and 'St. Louis,' were sounded by the characters, we can hardly err if we regard this tragic drama as a true precursor of *Hernani*. The end—'Zaïre! Elle m'aimait . . . sa sœur! J'étais aimé'—is true romance.

In spite of what has been said of the weakness of French lyric poetry, we must not fail to note the efforts in that direction which followed the impulse of Malherbe and Boileau. We have seen the attempts of Racine to produce lyric effects in his later dramas; we must now turn to what was attempted by poets who devoted themselves about the same time to the special cultivation of this branch of art.

Of the lighter poets of the *grand siècle*, by far the most spontaneous and original was La Fontaine, of whom some account was given in the proper place. He is said to have conceived his first taste for metrical composition when he was about twenty-two, from reading Malherbe; but he can hardly be called a follower of his school. Indeed, for a student of that day he was most catholic in taste; and he passed the next twenty-two years of his life in multifarious reading, and in open-air observation of the works of Nature. He was patronised by Fouquet, the magnificent but ill-starred

minister of Louis XIV, whose fall in 1661—celebrated in her own inimitable way by Mme de Sévigné—was also mourned by La Fontaine in a charming ode, *L'élégie aux Nymphes de Vaux*, which excited universal interest in all breasts but that of the inflexible despot himself.

La Fontaine now found it necessary to exert himself, and, true to his self-assumed name of 'Polyphile,' began to display the catholicity of thought and style, for which his desultory reading had prepared him. In the words of Demogeot: 'Sixteenth century, middle ages, classical antiquity, all that is happiest, most love-worthy, most elegant in earlier writers, began to be reproduced without effort, and to be resumed with the utmost charm in his natural and immortal writings.' His *Contes et nouvelles*, which appeared in 1665, showed that he had been an attentive observer of the selfish pleasures that the age was in the habit of veiling under the decorum of literary dignity. Never was licentious life more agreeably and simply depicted; the author was an impressionist, but one who could both draw and colour. There is no attempt to enhance the attractions of libertinage, but the manners of the time are stripped of their hypocrisy and rendered amusing. And many of the stories are of an irreproachable morality; only this was of no concern to the author, who merely undertook to tell a story. In doing so he has enhanced upon Boccaccio as much as the latter had done upon the fabliaux and Eastern tales from which he borrowed.

But what is best known of La Fontaine is of course his marvellous *Fables*. In these he is still the affable *bonhomme*, telling his stories of animals rather than of men, but still with apparent simplicity, through which ever and anon pierces a sudden flash of sly wisdom. The fables seem trivial, they elude analysis; yet no one but he has ever produced anything like them. In this style of writing one fancies that Béranger is the heir of La Fontaine; but Béranger is not really simple, he only affects to be so, as may be seen by comparing such a piece as *Le roi d'Yvetot* with a morsel of the older writer.

La Fontaine, however, was only to a small extent a 'lyric' writer; and he is chiefly to be noticed as a master of light verse, and one who, unlike his contemporaries, saw and even adopted some of the merits of Villon, Marot, and the Pleiad. But the first ode-writer proper, after Malherbe and Boileau, was J. B. Rousseau, born in 1671, and an assiduous disciple of the 'Legislator,' like Racine. 'Nothing brings such ill luck to a poet as speaking ill of Boileau,' once observed Voltaire; but neither the example nor the precept of the author of the *Art Pottique*, and the *Ode sur la prise de Namur*, was of very happy augury for lyric effort. Nevertheless it should be said of Rousseau that nothing whatever which could be done by the skilful use of existing methods was wanting in him—nothing but inspiration. He has a pure style, and an excellent ear; and when supplied—as he often was—with the sublime materials of Hebrew poetry, he produced work which, in the ranks of French lyric verse, stands deservedly high. Take for instance the description of the sun in the nineteenth psalm:—

Dans une éclatante voûte
 Il a placé, de ses mains,
 Ce soleil qui dans sa route,
 Eclaire tous les humains.
 Environné de lumière,
 Cet astre ouvre sa carrière
 Comme un époux glorieux
 Qui, dès l'aube matinale,
 De sa couche nuptiale
 Sort brillant et radieux.

Or this, upon the overthrow of the wicked:—

J'ai vu que leurs honneurs, leur gloire, leur richesse,
 Ne sont que des filets tendus à leur orgueil,
 Que le port n'est pour eux qu'un véritable écueil,
 Et que ces lits pompeux où s'endort la mollesse
 Ne couvrent qu'un affreux cercueil.
 Comment tant de grandeur c'est-elle évanouie !

Qu'est devenu l'éclat de ce vaste appareil?
Quoi! leur clarté s'éteint aux clartés du soleil,
Dans un sommeil profond ils ont passé leur vie,
Et la mort a fait leur réveil.

We feel the limitations of the language, but also that these limitations have been most ably dealt with. The style is both dignified and brilliant; and we see the influence it might have had in happier times on Chénier and on Hugo, to say nothing of living poets.

Rousseau wrote many odes without aid from the Bible. Here is a good passage on Glory:—

Juges insensés que nous sommes!
Nous admirons de tels exploits:
Est-ce donc le malheur des hommes
Qui fait la vertu des grands rois?
Leur gloire, féconde en ruines,
Sans le meurtre et sans les rapines
Ne saurait-elle subsister?
Images des dieux sur la terre,
Est-ce par des coups de tonnerre
Que leur grandeur doit éclater?

.
Montrez-nous, guerriers magnanimes,
Votre vertu dans tout son jour,
Voyons comment vos cœurs sublimes
Du sort soutiendront le retour.
Tant que sa faveur vous seconde
Vous êtes les maîtres du monde;
Mais, au moindre revers funeste,
Le masque tombe, l'homme reste,
Et le héros s'évanouit.

This is simple and severe; as are also the final lines of the consolatory ode to M. d'Ussé:—

Pourquoi d'une plainte importune
Fatiguer vainement les airs?
Aux jeux cruels de la Fortune

Tout est soumis dans l'univers.

.

Ainsi de douceurs en supplices
 Elle nous promène à son gré;
 Le seul remède à ses caprices
 C'est de s'y tenir préparé;
 De la voir du même visage,
 Qu'une courtisane volage,
 Indigne de nos moindres soins,
 Qui nous trahit, par imprudence,
 Et qui revient, par inconstance,
 Lorsque nous y pensons le moins.

But perhaps his finest lines in this vein occur in the Ode to the Comte de Luc, where he modestly disclaims the place of a great poet:—

Que ne puis-je franchir cette noble barrière !
 Mais, peu propre aux efforts d'une longue carrière,
 Je vais jusqu'où je puis;
 Et semblable à l'abeille, en nos jardins éclore,
 De différentes fleurs j'assemble et je compose
 Le miel que je produis.

.

Toutefois c'est ainsi que nos maîtres célèbres
 Ont dérobé leurs noms aux épaisses ténèbres
 De leur antiquité;
 Et ce n'est qu'en suivant leur périlleux exemple
 Que nous pouvons comme eux arriver jusqu'au temple
 De l'immortalité.

This is not first-rate as poetry, but it is good honest workmanship, and it has shown the way to greater men.

Rousseau died in exile (1741), punished for a political squib, which was never proved to be his, and of which—to judge from the inferiority of its execution—he was not the author. His death was lamented by Lefranc de Pompignan, a respected magistrate who wrote many things, but nothing to equal the work of Rousseau. From the following extract it will be seen that he was well inspired by his subject:—

D'une brillante et triste vie
Rousseau quitte aujourd'hui les fers;
Et, loin du ciel de sa patrie,
La mort termine ses revers.
D'où ses maux prirent-ils leur source?
Quelles épines, dans sa course,
Etouffaient les fleurs sous ses pas!
Quels ennuis! quelle vie errante!
Et quelle foule renaissante
D'adversaires et de combats!

.
Le Nil a vu, sur ses rivages,
Les noirs habitants des déserts
Insulter, par leurs cris sauvages,
L'astre éclatant de l'univers:
Cris impuissants, fureurs bizarres!
Tandis que ces monstres barbares
Poussaient d'insolentes clameurs
Le Dieu, poursuivant sa carrière,
Versait de torrents de lumière
Sur ces obscurs blasphémateurs.¹

Doubtless the tendency of the eighteenth century was not in the direction of passionate poetry. When Écouchard le Brun was considered the modern Pindar, and Delille the equivalent to Virgil, the age that pronounced such judgments had condemned itself. In England matters were almost as bad; yet we had Gray, and Collins, and Chatterton, and Burns, to show that the poetic impulse was not dead. The best French writers were men such as Gresset, Parny, Gilbert, Malfilâtre; and none of these has left any perceptible influence upon posterity. The best, as he was the last, of this series of writers was beyond a doubt André Chénier, who substituted for the pseudo-classicalism that had so long prevailed, a breath of living Greece which was, in a double sense, his mother-country. Chénier's case is unique. In form and discipline he belonged to the *grand siècle*, but the

¹ The second stanza has been already cited (*sup.* p. 95).

inspiration of his poems is rather that of the nineteenth century, in which, twenty-seven years after his death, they first appeared. Some specimens of Chénier have been already given. The following extract from the *Iambes*, written in prison, show the sincerity and precision of his style :—

Que promet l'avenir? quelle franchise auguste
De mâle constance et d'honneur?
Quels exemples sacrés, doux à l'âme du juste,
Pour lui quelles ombres du bonheur?
Quelle Thémis, terrible aux têtes criminelles,
Quels pleurs d'une noble piété,
Des antiques bienfaits quel souvenir fidèle,
Quels beaux échanges d'amitié
Font digne de regret l'habitude des hommes?
La peur blême et louche est leur dieu,
Le désespoir, le fer. Ah! lâches que nous sommes,
Tous, oui tous! adieu terre, adieu!

Before his misfortunes, Chénier wrote many lyric poems, in varied metres; and in some of these may be found a considerable forecast of the earlier manner of Victor Hugo, whose first odes and ballads appeared only three years after the posthumous publication of Chénier's words.

CHAPTER IX

SOURCES OF PROSE FICTION

HAVING traced the influences which contributed to form the dramatic and other poetry of the first half of the current century, we have now to look at the formation of its school of prose. The French 'novel' (as we should call it) has completely taken the place of the old-fashioned epic, and of the mediaeval *Roman*—whose name, indeed, it has even assumed—and has come to form the bulk (alike in quantity and in public favour) of current literature. With its present characteristics we are not concerned; but it may fairly be objected that, those characteristics being notoriously such as they are, we ought to have taken Balzac, rather than Hugo, as the best type of the class. To this we may, however, give two answers. Balzac was to some extent a new departure, not prepared or influenced by the earlier French writers; and, if he has led his immediate followers on a fatal path, it is still possible that saner traditions may revive and lead to wiser and more beneficent practice. For it was not to the evils of his system that the supposed, if not the actual, founder of Realism was led by the examples of the past. From his twenty-first year to 1830, Balzac kept on for ten years endeavouring to find fame and fortune by writing romantic and historical novels in the fashion of Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*; and it was only when the public would have none of them that he took up the pencil of Beyle, and produced *La Peau de Chagrin*. The physiologic,

it might be almost better to call it the 'pathologic,' soon became the favourite method of French fiction. Virtue was mostly to be ignored, or condemned as Philistine egotism. 'I should like,' says Vautrin, 'to see the faces of our well-conducted friends at the Day of Judgment if they found that the Almighty was prevented from taking his seat in Court.' Not that there need be such a thing as vice either. Only human nature was to be treated as a mere form of matter, more or less diseased; its morbid aspects were to be diagnosed, its secret springs and motives laid bare upon the dissecting-table; all readers to be invited to form members of the crowd on the benches of a surgical theatre or at the beds of a clinical hospital. Balzac was far too genial to have admitted such a doctrine; yet there can be no doubt that it was from this unblessed inspiration that much of his immediate popularity as an artist arose. It seems equally probable that from this source came the elaborate cynicism of Flaubert, the artistic cynicism of Théophile Gautier, and the realistic cynicism of still more recent novelists. Balzac, indeed, had been anything rather than a mere cynic; many of his tales show an appreciation of moral goodness, and especially in the female characters. Witness the charming conceptions in *Modeste Mignon*, *Eugénie Grandet*, etc. Perhaps the first impulse of moral pessimism did not come from Balzac so much as from Beyle, who was uninfluenced by any contemporary movement, and rather inspired, through Ariosto and Boccaccio, by such ancient cynics as Martial and Petronius.

We English are accused of prudish hypocrisy; and even our native critics have sometimes complained that such realistic writers as Thackeray and Dickens have injured their art by too much reticence, and too much reverence for boys and girls. Be this as it may—and we are not here concerned with this aspect of the matter—it may at least be noted that such scruples are not peculiarly English. They are shared by some good French authors; and we will hope

that the examples sometimes set by About, Feuillet, and Cherbuliez may find competent followers. If they do, it will be in no small degree attributable to the warm and loving influence of Victor Hugo.

In the last chapter but one we referred to the faulty side of Hugo's prose romances. This was not intended, however, to derogate from the merits of this great master. Any one who had the honour of Hugo's acquaintance must be strangely insensible to true greatness, if he failed to perceive the element of goodness which was never separated from it. The pity for undeserved sorrow, the indignation at oppression, the benevolence towards the weak, that were so conspicuous in Hugo's writings, found a practical expression in his love of children and his zeal in good works. In this, though not an orthodox Christian, he was a follower of Him who said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me'; and, with all his independence of conduct, there was a sympathy with youth, due perhaps to a certain childlikeness in his own nature. This may have inspired his beauties, while it helped to account for his mistakes. With the enthusiasm of a noble boy, Hugo had something of the harmless egotism, the hasty and often wrong-headed judgment, the omniscient air, the superb contempt for accuracy of detail, which too often exist in boyhood. But his transparent honesty, and the glow of his love and enthusiasm, mark the writer, as they marked the man.

These are not in themselves literary qualities; yet, taking Buffon's dictum for what it was worth, there is always some reflection on the page of an author of that inward flame of character which cannot be wholly concealed. Other qualities there were which were not so exclusively his own, but for which he must have been, partly at least, indebted to preceding artists. Amongst these were bulk, energy, earnestness, an ideal of manly worth and of womanly grace, a desire to do poetic justice and to compensate the benevolent reader for the sufferings through which he had been conducted, by sympathy with the more love-worthy of the characters.

Having made this explanation we must now turn to the influence of older writers. At the beginning of the Great Age, the *Roman* was not the important thing it now is; and, consequently, the new departure did not take place quite so soon in this as in other walks of literary art. But, as soon as the modern French language was sufficiently settled, it was used by the poets for literary purposes; and prose writers were not long in following on the same path. Malherbe wrote between 1600 and 1627, but before he was dead Descartes and Jean de Balzac had begun to fix the model and framework of modern prose. Then came the famous epoch of the *Provincial Letters*. The new acquisition was very soon used in fictitious narrative, though it took many years to prove its superiority for that purpose, and to drive to the moon's appropriate sphere all lunacies as to copying the ancients, and telling long-winded stories under the name of epic poetry. But the epic was to the prose novel what the stage-coach is to the locomotive; and although the palaeozoic vehicle continued to form part of the state paraphernalia of ambitious authors down to Voltaire, and even later, public taste gradually ousted it, in favour of the more rapid and popular method of movement.

The general idea of the prose romance was at first taken from the epic, which it equalled, or even exceeded, in bulk. It has been already mentioned to what an unwieldy length some of the romances of Mdlle de Scudéri extended. Highly pitched as to moral tone, these tales exhibited the unmerited but purifying troubles of the blameless hero in pursuit of his equally meritorious mistress. Some culture, and a little wit, were necessary to the performance; the characters and adventures were as exaggerated as anything in Corneille, without his undeniable inspiration. Mdlle de Scudéri had the good luck to come at the right moment, and passed for a great artist until reduced to a lower level by the sarcastic notice of her work in Boileau's *Art Pottique* (1670)—

Gardez donc de donner, ainsi que dans Clélie,
L'air ni l'esprit françois à l'antique Italic,

Et, sous des noms romains faisant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant et Brutus dameret.

The sarcasm was not undeserved. Besides adventures that created no interest and dangers that caused no anxiety, these ponderous narratives wandered on through six or eight thousand pages; in which Anacréon turns up at Praeneste, making the life and soul of society by his conversation and his pretty verses, while Brutus exchanges rhymed compliments with the chaste Lucretia—the antique names of course indicating contemporary characters in whom these manners seemed natural. The heroes with the most renowned names, and on the verge of the most momentous undertakings, are willing to sit down and listen to the adventures of ladies, where the most thrilling incident is a lost bracelet or a misdirected letter. One of them actually finds time to draw a map of the continent of Tenderness, because the heroine, he says, has three different motives for being tender, ‘either esteem, gratitude, or inclination.’ So he declares there must be three cities of Tenderness, each upon its separate river, namely ‘Tendre-sur-Estime, Tendre-sur-Reconnaissance, et Tendre-sur-Inclination.’ And so on, and so on, until the ‘éclatante folie’ becomes insupportable to Boileau and to all men.

Nevertheless, we can hardly fail to perceive a like tendency to length, though of a far more stimulating character, in a few of our modern romances; some readers have even felt inclined to skip, when confronted by protracted descriptions of a carronade, or an analysis of the emotions of Gilliat. Nor was this indefinite garrulity the only particular in which Hugo followed in the steps of the authors of the early novels—Scudéri, La Calprenède, and Gomberville. He also resembles them in the habit of painting types, in lieu of individual characters. Not perhaps always; a few creations, such as that of the Marquis de Lantenac, might be cited from his novels; and, if he does not generally paint from life, he at least avoids the other extreme—so offensive in Balzac and the modern Realists—of picking out abnormal and offensive individuals

and events, on which to lavish all the minuteness of observation and description.

Realism made its appearance soon after the high-flown romance from which it was the inevitable reaction. Scarron, in the *Roman comique*, and Furetière, in the *Roman bourgeois*, started the novel of daily life—whether invented or newly transcribed—which was afterwards to have such overweening fortunes. Mme de La Fayette too, especially in her *Princesse de Clèves*, gave proof that even such a subject as that of a loved and honoured wife, chastely returning the passion of one who is not her husband, could be treated with the utmost delicacy. An extract from this charming work will be found in Mr. Saintsbury's *Specimens* (p. 200, second edition). The *Zaïde* of this writer is also commended by La Harpe.

An important link in the genealogy of the modern novel is to be found in *Gil Blas*. Here, again, the characters are somewhat typical; and, on the other hand, the exclusively satirical tone of the story confines the reader's attention to the affairs of knaves and fools, and thus lays the foundation of the pessimism and negation of good which so largely taints modern French novel-writing. Yet the book is in itself so excellent, the details are so accurate, the observation is so sincere, that *Gil Blas* is, as La Harpe well says, one of the small number of novels which one is always ready to read again. It is, however, so distinctly unideal, as to call for no farther notice in the present connection.

A far more poetical, imaginative, and high-minded piece of work is *Don Quixote*, which became French through the intermediation of Le Sage, and deserves notice among the factors of the better school of modern fiction. The generous ardour of the half-witted but wholly noble hero will always make *Don Quixote* a source of truly pathetic interest to all worthy readers.

A purely French novel, in which low life is unexpectedly streaked with a pure pathos, is *Manon Lescaut*, of which

something has been said elsewhere. That there should be anything deserving of serious attention in the lives and loves of a male and female adventurer, and that a career of revolting vice and squalid suffering should be glorified by unselfish devotion, seems beyond probability. The author, too, was a man of poor character, and the story was an episode in a long-forgotten book of no great merit—the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*. The author appears to have had an uncontrollable fertility of imagination; he was a sort of improvisator who never knew where to stop his pen, and had no sense of measure or proportion. But the unity of his subject, and the impassable boundaries of a short tale set in a long one, cured these defects for the moment, and led to the production of an exquisite little masterpiece, in which the prose of the surroundings enhanced the poetry of the situation. The death of Manon in the prairie left the pedantic La Harpe affected to passion; 'never,' he writes, 'have I experienced an emotion so profound, a tenderness so painful, as at the conclusion of this work.' The passage will be found in Mr. Saintsbury's *Specimens* (p. 323).

Nor must Marivaux be omitted, he whose style gave a new term to the literary language of his country. *Marivaudage* is a certain preciousness of expression with an affectation of negligence, in which strained subtleties of conception are stated in popular phraseology, and sentiments are turned and re-turned until they assume all possible shapes, and at last evaporate altogether under the manipulation. But in his story of *Marianne*, the author found a favourable subject for this treatment—a method, be it observed, that could neither have been originated nor habitually practised by a man of ordinary intellect. Here the author set before himself the amusing task of making a plebeian woman relate the adventures of her youth, at an age when she has no further concern in them beyond amusing herself with the recollection and justifying herself to herself with a complacent casuistry.

Il y a [says Marianne] des gens dont la vanité se mêle de tout ce qu'ils font, même de leurs lectures. Donnez-leur l'histoire du cœur humain dans les grandes conditions, ce devient là pour eux un objet important; mais ne leur parlez pas des états médiocres; ils ne veulent voir agir que des seigneurs, des princes, des rois—ou, du moins, des personnes qui aient fait une grande figure. Il n'y a que cela qui existe pour la noblesse de leur goût. Laissez là le reste des hommes; qu'ils vivent; mais qu'il n'en soit pas question. Ils vous diraient que la nature aurait bien pu se passer de les faire naitre, et que les bourgeois la déshonnorent.

Apart from the studied repetition of phrase, there was sincerity in the idea, at the time when Marivaux expressed it, though it has been taken up and enhanced by many writers since then, until it has become a literary commonplace, and, in its extravagance, a source of vulgarity and evil. The first outcome of the notion that the adventures of laundresses and servant-maids were a source of legitimate interest for the world at large was Richardson's *Pamela*, a work of which we need here say no more. But the whole of Richardson's voluminous fiction having been translated by the author of *Manon Lescaut*—for Prévost was not only a man of genius, but also a good English scholar—is significant; and makes it proper to notice Richardson as one of the determining influences by which French novel-writing was formed and fortified. If to Englishmen, at the present day, the writings of the good bookseller of Cornhill are understood to be something of a weariness, we may judge what his artless verbiage, and volumes of uneventful epistles, must have been to a society so absorbed in form and rule, so intolerant of tedium, as that of Paris in the time of Louis XV. And yet in these works, especially in the noble figure of the ill-starred Clarissa and her unmerited sorrows, there was, and has ever since been, something that has profoundly affected the French intellect. Thus do nations, between whom there is constant intercourse, act and react upon each other. The *Marianne* of Marivaux stimulates an Englishman to write his first novel; and it is followed by another, which has pitched the key for

generations of French authors, and whose influence is traceable in Beyle and Balzac, and perhaps in the M. Bourget of to-day.

The 'premier roman du monde' for La Harpe was also an English novel, though one of a very different school. *Tom Jones*, the work thus extolled, has not been without its influence in France. The rough manners of Fielding's work, the coarse adventures, the glaring contrasts, must have been so many hedges of thorn for the polite Frenchman of the eighteenth century. But there was at least one contrast that he was able to understand—that between hearty sensuousness and hidden wickedness. Hypocrisy—the fault which our gay neighbours have always deemed our peculiar reproach—is here, by an English hand, stripped of the fine robes that it wears when paying homage to virtue; while those sins of sense, which to an average Frenchman appear no sins at all, are united with personal charm and an engaging candour. The lesson may not have been altogether needed; it was inevitably welcomed and appropriated.

La Harpe further points out the consummate art of Fielding, and the difficulty of reproducing it, under the conditions of an art so alien as the French. Richardson has been often traceable in French fiction—notably in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, of which we shall have a word to say presently. But the extreme appearance of simplicity with which, in *Tom Jones*, one event arises out of another, while the hand of the author remains invisible, is chiefly to be seen in the short tales of Mérimée, and then weakened by the slight interest excited by his comparatively unamiable characters. It is doubtful how far the prose fiction of Voltaire has made a school; indeed, we should have to commence by saying that his mind was too unique to be closely followed. The world must wait for another Voltaire before it can hope to have anything quite like those short stories which are the most characteristic of his works. A contemporary imitator did, indeed, produce a continuation of *Candide*, which deceived an English editor;

but it hardly needs the author's own warning (at the end of the *Princesse de Babylon*) to prepare readers of average taste from being misled.

The stories of Diderot and the younger Crébillon are to be noticed rather for their encouragement of license, than as high works of art. They are the descendants of the mediaeval *Fabliaux*; and they have had far too much authority among their own successors. That there are French novelists, and great ones, who have resisted these temptations is as true as it is gratifying. If it be a sound principle that the mission of Art is to console and purify, the tales that are issued for the solitary leisure of adult males are less likely to become the permanent classics of a great nation.

At the risk of being tedious, we would enlarge on this point. The two justificatory pleas of the school we are condemning are that Nature is our only sure guide, and that if the world is presented as full of wickedness and misery, that is not the fault of those whose business it is to paint it truly. To the first plea it has been often answered that Nature in all her aspects is not a safe guide; a lovely woman often makes an unpleasing photograph. Art undertakes to imitate, but also to idealise, Nature; if it tries to *be* Nature, then it fails, as the imitation of anything implies the action of something else. Who undertakes to imitate himself? To the second we may surely say, *non constat*. If we choose to deny the universal evil of the world, we throw the burden of proof on those who make the assertion that it is so. But let us go farther, and suppose that the pessimists have proved that this is the worst of all possible worlds—a thing evidently not easily done, since they know of no other. Even thus, by so doing they admit the possibility of something better; and, since we have to live in that which they have proved the worst, it is surely to our advantage that we should be occasionally relieved and refreshed, by being transported into a place where we may have glimpses of the better land. And what can do this better than the idealist form of literary art? Whenever we

look at a fine statue, we see of what beauty—missed by ourselves—our offspring may be capable. When we hear a lovely quartette played by masters of the string, we feel that there is a musical condition where low care is absent, and where tender emotions fill the mind. And why should it be otherwise when we come under the direct influence of literary art, and read of the unselfish love of Cordelia, the generous philanthropy of the poor Spanish Don, the conjugal fondness of Amelia, the obdurate virtue of Jean Valjean? If, on the contrary, Art is to be always reminding us of our own impotence, and of the miseries which are caused by the weakness and wickedness of others, of the freaks of fortune and the Plutonian forces of Nature, it would be better to have no Art at all. Then we could at least, in the intoxication of the senses or in the oblivion of labour, gain some moments of forgetfulness, freed from this treacherous and sinister monitress, whom the pessimist artist sends to dog our steps, and to haunt our hours of repose.

The justification of these things, however, is an afterthought. The author of the *Sopha* doubtless meant no more than to make money by pandering to ignoble tastes: and the blame attaches to his public, as much as to himself. But the mischief done was irreparable. Crébillon was followed by Louvet, and the morals of the Revolution were as bad—with much worse manners—as those of the corrupt period which was supposed to have caused the Revolution; vicious with the addition of coarseness and cruelty. Burke's well-known comment on that period, as one in which vice lost half its evil in losing all its grossness, may seem a mere rhetorical flourish; yet perhaps the phrase, a little turned, may prove more important; for vice, spread among the whole people and accompanied by unrestrained exhibitions of rude violence, must make life more intolerable than any amount of immorality, hidden by the discipline of a refined society.

In any case the thing went on. The *Adventures of the Chevalier de Faublas* were as bad as anything of the earlier

time, though the excitement of the period was soon to turn the thoughts of men into other channels. But before we say anything more of the Revolution, we must turn back to the writer who did more than any other one man to cause it, and view J. J. Rousseau as a novelist.

This paradoxical and eloquent maniac was of the strictest puritan principles—so long, at least, as his own conduct was out of the question. He denounced the theatres, and looked upon the writers of tales like the *Sopha* as corrupters of the public. His own great work of fiction was the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, a story intended to be a step in the direction indicated by Richardson, the English writer who had ‘taught the passions to move at the command of virtue.’ As the title implies, the story is one of a young woman who opposes the plans formed for her by her father, and bestows her affections on the man who has formed her mind. But the English citizen had a surer touch, alike in taste and in judgment, than the Genevese vagabond. Clarissa leaves her home to avoid paternal persecution, and her proud heart breaks rather than live dishonoured. Rousseau’s heroine, loving St. Preux, yet marries Wolmar, her father’s choice; the letters and the conversation of the parties go on to all kinds of topics, however irrelevant to the situations; St. Preux lives with the young couple without causing any disquiet to himself, or any jealousy to the husband, Wolmar, though the latter knows of the relations of his wife and her old admirer. That is a situation open to every kind of objection, as much to be denounced in the interests of taste, as in those of virtue; and too abnormal to be either of artistic merit or practical significance. That the book, like all the literary work of the extraordinary being who was its author, is full of original thought, warm feeling, and passionate language, is true; and these great qualities have given it all the attraction by which it became so dangerous. The calm ignoring of responsibility, and the sophistical reasoning away of moral restraint and dutiful exertion, are invariably fraught with more peril to society than direct

profligacy is. *Émile*, though a far healthier and more agreeable book, need not detain us as a novel. If Rousseau's earlier writings had been a plea for the rights of man, this was the manifesto of the rights of childhood. As such it has had a deserved influence; but the narrative was perhaps little more than a gilding of the pill that the writer endeavoured to administer.

But, as the work of an eloquent and unconventional man, the *Nouvelle Héloïse* takes a higher place in literary history, a place, indeed, far above what it would receive on its merits as a mere novel. The plot is thin, and not very interesting; and the solution of Julie's dilemma between M. de Wolmar, the cold aristocrat to whom she belongs by law, and the brilliant plebeian who has stolen her heart, is *naïf* to puerility. Nevertheless, by the charm of the writing, the reality of the passion, and—most of all—the pictorial power of the scenery, the book marks an epoch. The descriptive power of Rousseau is pointed by observation, which redeems the almost luscious richness of the style.

This characteristic was reproduced in the novels of Bernardin de St. Pierre, of which a brief account has been given in the proper place. It is only necessary here to add that the influence of Bernardin's two tales—*Paul et Virginie* and *La Chaumière Indienne*—is unmistakably apparent in the subsequent writings of Chateaubriand, to the popularity of which that element largely contributed. And it is not too much to say that—without direct or conscious imitation—Hugo largely preserved the best parts of this tradition. The word-painting of his description is so masterly that it sometimes produces the illusion of pictorial work, to which it adds the sense of movement that the pencil cannot give.

To speak of Marmontel and Florian side by side with Rousseau seems absurd; yet they are the only men among his contemporaries whose work has made the least impression on posterity. The *Bélisaire* of the former is a good example of the old-fashioned historical novel, less fascinating

than the *Télèmaque* of the Archbishop of Cambrai, less accurate than the subsequent things of the same kind by Chateaubriand and Mérimée, but quite readable still. In *Les Incas* Marmontel was able to portray characters more near to the life of modern times, while the remoteness in space enabled a man of his imagination to supply scenery and local colour, which, if not always correct, were not without illusion. Florian is now chiefly remembered for his Fables.

Then came the Revolution; and culture was swept away like an old garment, and the voices of all the Muses were hushed in the roar of the forum and the din of arms. It was not until the establishment of the Consulate that literary art resumed its soothing ministry. Not that the star of Napoleon was propitious to that, or to any other art, but that men's minds inevitably expanded after a long and severe compression. The two most famous writers of fiction during the Consulat and Empire owed nothing to Napoleon but the stimulus of reaction. Chateaubriand's first romance, *Atala*, appeared in 1801, and won immediate and general admiration. Owing something to Rousseau, something to Bernardin de St. Pierre, the young nobleman added a new element derived from his travels in America, his recent conversion to Catholic Christianity, and his peculiar vein of quasi-enthusiastic declamation.

Chateaubriand had not always been a believer: his *Essay on Revolutions*, published in 1797, had breathed a spirit of almost morbid scepticism. But we have seen under what influences he returned to the fold of his infancy, and what had been the first-fruits of his conversion. The object of his *Genie du Christianisme* (1802) had been to recommend the Catholic faith to persons of taste, and to show its achievements rather than its demonstrable truth. The line of defence did not please the more severely orthodox. Bonald complained that, while Christian verity was a king at the head of conquering armies, Chateaubriand had represented it as a queen, surrounded by a bevy of graceful maidens.

Such also was the Christianity of *Atala*, in which the author preluded on the same string. As in politics, the author's opinions were various like his moods and surroundings; while his religious creed was more an affair of sentimental than of rational conviction. Yet this probably strengthened his influence in his very peculiar period, when men were seeking rather to be soothed than convinced.

Atala was the first-fruit of the author's American travel, and a sort of imaginative overture to his more laboured plea for Christianity. He assured the reader, in his first Preface, that the tale had been written in the desert, beneath the huts of the savages; but this is probably no better than a pious fraud, since there is abundant evidence, as in his already mentioned *Essay on Revolutions*—published in 1797—that he had, at the time of his American travels, no belief in Christianity. It was not until his return to France, in the last year of the century, that he determined to become the disciple and the advocate of the Church. He professed to cast his romance in what he called 'the antique form,' though it is difficult to see what antique work could have been his model. At all events he meant to discard the philosophic heresies of J. J. Rousseau. He declared that he was no enthusiastic admirer of savage life, or even of Nature; but, if these things were to be depicted, let it be in their beautiful aspects alone; Art should not concern herself with the imitation of the monstrous. Following these clearly-conceived canons, he supposes a civilised Redskin, named Chactas, perhaps suggested by the 'Huron' of Voltaire's *Ingénu*, who tells his tragical adventures to the French traveller René; and the story, in spite of the sustained eloquence of the style and the artistic vividness of the scenery, is impregnated with an unspontaneous and insincere sentiment. It is plain that the author is of the school of Bernardin de St. Pierre, even though he surpasses his master in the richness of his imagination, the extent and diversity of his observation, the complexity of his views and motives. What Bernardin

endeavoured to do for Theism, Chateaubriand did, with greater power, for the sentimental side of Latin Christianity; and his work has the freshness of a young writer's first romance. The idea was afterwards applied to a historical development in *Les Martyrs*, a powerful, though unequal, picture of the persecution of the primitive church by Diocletian.

Chateaubriand's next utterance was on the notion—so much overdone subsequently by such diverse authors as Byron and Lamartine—of the weary young man of fashion, mined by a secret sorrow, which he seeks to bury in the maternal breast of Nature. This was in *René*, a continuation, in some measure, of *Atala*; and by no means free from the drawbacks usually found in continuations. It is a sort of 'sentimental journey,' in which the author once more draws upon his recollections of American travel. In giving a glorified view of his own experiences he definitely breaks with the past, and sings the palinode of his time. The age of disillusion and doubt—of the *Enfant du Siècle*, Musset, and the decadent young men who parade their eccentricities to-day—was then beginning; and Chateaubriand was its earliest prophet. A rhetorician without purpose, a man without conviction, his readiness to follow his ideas and his very considerable *technique* combined to make him eminent as a precursor of the romantic movement.

Contemporaneous with *René* and *Les Martyrs* were the novels of Mme de Staël, *Delphine* and *Corinne*, in which the same pompous sort of melancholy, and a similar vein of eloquence, gorgeous to tawdriness, were distinguishing features. In each case the author used a certain disguised egotism, and sate before the looking-glass to draw the portraits of her heroines; *Corinne* is much the better of the two, and still finds admirers, though the author's influence has not endured, and is only faintly seen in later writers, such as George Sand. This latter writer is only to be noted here as a contrast to Balzac, in her extreme facility and her complete reflection of passing moods of feeling and opinion. Her influence does not promise to endure.

Thus we are brought back to the conviction that the great founder of the Romantic school, and the man who did the best work in it, was undoubtedly Victor Hugo, who, beginning his career in his earliest manhood, appeared in the *Muse française* as the exaggerated royalist, seeking to address a select audience, and to interest them in the ages of feudalism with their trappings of steel, their glittering crests, and nodding plumes. This was followed in 1827 by the Preface to *Cromwell*, the manifesto of the new movement; as in an earlier day, Du Bellay's *Défense* of 1549, and Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Wordsworth's object, as we all know, was twofold. In the first place, he claimed for the literary artist the right to dispense with the so-called 'poetical diction,' and address the public in the language of common life. Secondly, he proposed to find inspiration in the humblest facts of experience. As he said later, in the *Excursion*, he would please,

by words

Which speak of nothing more than what we are;

and he enquired why Paradise should be

A history only of departed things

Or a mere fiction of what never was?

For the discerning intellect of man,

When wedded to this goodly universe

In love and holy passion, shall find these

A simple product of the common day.

This was indeed much below the original prospectus of the *Cénacle*. Nevertheless, so far back as 1822, the young Hugo had conceived something not dissimilar. 'Beneath the surface of the actual,' he said, 'there lies an ideal world for those who, by dint of contemplation, have learned to see in all things a something beyond.' At that time, however, Hugo did not perceive, what the English poet did, that each age should have an art of its own. Hugo was more like a modern architect who, when charged with designing a

church, goes to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and copies his details from things that then sprang spontaneously out of the needs and feelings of their period, but which have no relation to his own times. In the same spirit, which indeed never quite left him, he sometimes unsuccessfully attempted realism, by the elaborate representation of the abnormal and the hideous. Consequently he laid himself open to the charge of those critics, who accused him of overthrowing one idol to set up another; and who said that, in seeking to be natural, he only succeeded in becoming grotesque. Hugo, therefore, cannot be considered a realist.

The true founder of the best realistic school in fiction—that which seeks to select the subjects it portrays, to breathe into them the breath of life, and at the same time to beautify them with the light of romance—was Henri Beyle, who usually wrote under the pseudonym of ‘de Stendhal.’ Beyle was a strange creature, tremulously sensitive, with high levels of aspiration, yet fond of mystification. French to the core, he was nevertheless so attached to Italy, that he insisted on being described, in an Italian epitaph on his tombstone, as a native of Milan. The son of a *bourgeois* of royalist opinions, he entered the commissariat branch of Napoleon’s army, and was for some time attached to the vice-regal establishment of Eugène Beauharnais at his beloved Milan. After following the fortunes of Napoleon, of whom however he, as a strong republican, was no admirer, he settled for a time at Paris, whence he paid several visits to London. After the accession of Louis Philippe in 1830, he returned to Italy, and only returned to Paris, some twelve years later, to die. Besides numerous critical and biographical miscellanies, he wrote two wonderful novels, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, and *Le Rouge et le Noir*. He also left behind him personal Memoirs, addressed to the future people of 1880, which have been recently published.¹

¹ A complete series of Beyle’s stories and lighter works has been brought out by the firm of Lévy in Paris (22 vols., 18mo), 1886.

Of these two novels, each of which is of very moderate bulk, the *Chartreuse* is by far the more remarkable. It is mainly a relation of the love affairs of two supposed Italians, one a politician, the Count Mosca della Rovere; the other an ecclesiastic, Fabrice del Dongo. There is no attempt to beguile the favour of the reader. The plot is thin, the style is rough, the incidents are sparse and not very interesting, and the termination is unsatisfactory. But the treatment of the characters shows a most marvellous combination of analysis and synthesis. They palpitate with actuality, so that the reader seems to be watching the evolution of living conduct. It has been said that no book was so often in the hands of Talleyrand, who ought to have been a good judge of a statesman, and who said, as often as he closed the volume, 'Où ce diable d'homme a-t-il pu trouver Mosca?'

It is this combination of analysis and synthesis, this capacity to realise the ideal, that has led modern critics—for whom alone Beyle professed to write—to the conclusion that he is the common progenitor of the two schools of modern French fiction. What are the main characteristics of each of these we are next to consider, so far as it can be done without criticism of living writers.

The ordinary classification of novels is into romantic and realistic; but in some of our attempts at critical appreciation we have already seen the difficulty of adopting it. If a man gives copious details, and produces his pictures of men and things as from a note-book, one naturally calls him 'a Realist'; but, supposing that the men and things prove to be abnormal or monstrous—distorted by wrong standpoints, and coloured by mistaken prejudices—will the delineation of these be *real*? They will hardly be recognised as such by the average of readers. Is Dickens, for example, 'romantic'? Take for instance *Pickwick* and the Wellers, and all the gallery of oddities that followed; there is scarcely a true romantic or mediaeval conception among them. Still less is his work 'real,' in the true sense of the word; for none but

perhaps a very young person, reading them for the first time, could take such stories seriously, could suppose that the characters ever existed, or that the events are products of direct unbiassed observation. So difficult is this application of the terms that another idea altogether has been suggested, viz. the distinction between stories that are 'subjective' and those that are 'objective.' Apart from German pedantry, this appears a more hopeful classification; only we must get a clear idea of the meaning of the terms 'subject' and 'object'; and this is very difficult to obtain and to preserve, in the case of words that are used so arbitrarily, and so much out of their usual meaning.

Nor is the distinction, even if made clear, an altogether satisfactory one in practice. Taking the definition from an excellent modern dictionary, we find that '*objective*, or relating to an *object*, means exterior to the mind, as opposed to *subjective*: that which is real or existent in nature, in contrast with what is ideal, or exists merely in the thought of the individual.'¹ Now, was Charles d'Orléans—to make a single practical application—*objective*? He was always writing about what was 'exterior to the mind.' How impressive must have been his long residence in England, and how striking many of the other experiences of his varied life, although there is no trace of them in his writings! Yet his poetry deals with *objects*, in spite of which one feels that the word is not quite appropriate, when one comes to observe how carefully he selects his matter, and how completely he presents it as refracted in his own very peculiar character. On the other hand, take Villon, a late contemporary: was he *subjective*?

If constantly treating of himself, his own affairs and his own adventures, could make a subjective writer, he certainly would be entitled to be so classed. But, when one comes to notice particularly, both the nature of his topics and his method of treating them, one seems to miss the ideal or

¹ *Chambers's Dictionary.*

exclusive action of the mind involved in the definition. Villon may indeed practise some hidden selection of objects, but he appears in general to take them as they come, and describe them as they are. He may write by preference about digging; he certainly calls a spade 'a spade.'

We may be excused, therefore, if we propose to keep to this latter classification, but to express it in a simpler manner, calling the former school the 'intuitive,' and the latter the 'perceptive.' In the first class will come such works as flow from the working of the writer's mind, upon materials partly indeed provided by the senses, but dependent for their ultimate effect upon some other faculty. The second will include all those whose production only requires attentive observation, and a good memory. To keep up the illustration from English literature, we may say that *Ivanhoe* is a specimen of the 'intuitive' school, and that *The Antiquary* and *St. Ronan's Well* are the same; on the other hand Defoe's *Journal of the Plague* is 'perceptive,' even though he never saw the events described. We may thus bring our subject into the two great categories in which all human affairs may be ranked.

It is to be noted that Gautier distinctly declares that Balzac was a non-realistic writer; and from his judgment it seems useless to appeal. He adds:—

Balzac, que l'école réaliste semble vouloir revendiquer pour maître, n'a aucun rapport de tendance avec elle.

This is plain and unequivocal. How, then, did realism arise? We have already expressed the opinion that it arose from the same source as the many streams of paradox and eccentricity that have, at all times, disturbed the arts. If any man, or set of men, be supposed to have deliberately sat down saying 'Go to, let us write descriptions of dung-hills, and produce photographs of disease and deformity, and call the result Art,' it would be an unpleasant thing to say who he was, or who they were. But let us, at least, save our great

names, the names of those mighty and loving artists to whom society owes so much, from the insulting association with such miserable work.

The influence of Balzac on realistic literature has been, no doubt, great. Yet his talent was so peculiar that he has founded no school, and he is never likely to produce successful imitators. If he shares with Beyle the power of exhibiting imaginary characters in a colourless but convincing light, he also resembles our own Dickens in being first convinced himself. Such fiction hardly seems conscious art. It rather reminds us of a dream, in which we see extraordinary incidents, and take part in astonishing events, without doubting their reality: the artist's share is the putting himself into the necessary condition. This species of voluntary hallucination begins in the author's mind, and is communicated to the reader, not by any force of style—for Balzac is a dry and laboured writer, with no persuasive sweetness—but by the obstinate tone of good faith, in which the characters and adventures are set before us. In point of style, indeed, Balzac was almost a professed anti-stylist. He laboured strenuously to express what was in his mind, but did not care for musical utterance. There are some interesting anecdotes on this subject recorded by Théophile Gautier, himself as great a master of prose as of verse (see *Portraits Contemporains*, Paris, 1874). The school of Duclos in the last century had already waged war against metrical composition; and, whenever they found themselves constrained to praise a piece of poetry, the formula of its members was—‘C'est beau comme la prose.’ That, however, was only a paradox with them; it was reserved to later writers to adopt it as a principle of art. Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, George Sand, were all incapable of writing in verse, but they had an almost inexhaustible vein of prose rhetoric. With Balzac it was different. He was not only unable to compose metrically, he even wrote prose with the utmost difficulty. We must end, therefore, as we began. His peculiar—let us even say his inimitable—

power is founded upon an element, painfully morbid, which makes his mind unlike almost all other minds; namely, that dreaming-awake, which makes imagined men and women more real to him than those whom he jostles in the street. He lived a life of hallucination. The common pedestrian truth of ordinary mortals did not enter into his philosophy; the characters of the novel on which he was engaged had appointments with him round the corner; some great investment that was to make his fortune was all but complete, though by some mishap it never quite came off: he moved in what, if we may be allowed a return to the pedantic phrase, was a purely 'subjective world.'

From all this it may be judged how impossible it was for such a man to found a school. So far as any one could imitate him, it might seem as if it was rather done by the English Dickens, than by any French writer. Dickens certainly resembled him in his power of imparting to the reader his own belief in persons, who were after all unreal to impossibility; as he also did in the inability to put upon the stage a thoroughly well-bred man or woman.

But Beyle had another follower, a man of far more education and literary form than Balzac, though without the peculiar visionary faculty (or disease) that characterised the latter. Is it possible to find in Prosper Mérimée the founder of the photographic school? Balzac had not been an 'observer,' in the strict sense of the word; for it is obviously impossible for any man in a short life—most of which is spent in his own library—to study two thousand different human beings (such roughly is the number of Balzac's characters), besides sketching all their surroundings. Like Dickens, to whom we have already compared him, Balzac observed the unusual, alike in things and in men. For superficial oddness he had an open eye. But the rest he got out of his own mind, in throwing his conceptions on paper, and still more in maturing them, during the long and anxious process of shaping and reshaping them in proof. Mérimée—a far less original man, and a less

laborious worker—resembled him in this, that he left a great part of his work to his imagination. The same may be said of Flaubert. All these three artists, and those who have learned in any degree to work like them, have recognised the office of what is called the ‘subjective’ method, whereby the materials collected by the senses are brooded over by the receptive and creative mind, until they appear as something new after a longer or shorter period of incubation. If the realistic system has arisen out of anything set a-going by Beyle or Balzac, it has been by accident, more than by design. The realistic novelists have taken away from art the one thing which to most people has hitherto given art its value, Idealism; and if they have done their utmost to extinguish

The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet’s dream,

they have done so owing to their ambition, and also to their incapacity. Their motto is, *Let us be read!* As all truths have been told, they think they must have recourse to untruth; and, although they do so in the name of truth itself, their obvious fallacy consists in putting their awkward and distorted photographs before us as if these were artistic creations. Instead of the selective reserve and the dexterous address, by which classical masters have consoled and stimulated the minds of men, they depress us by their transcripts of the miseries of human life, made without selection, or by a selection in itself abnormal.

Here, in England, we have not quite got to this pass. Our Teutonic blood still fires the imagination, and supplies an antiseptic force, which seems to be dying out—if it ever existed—in the art of France. We see what La Harpe thought of Fielding and Richardson; even Shakspeare has found admirers in France, since Victor Hugo made him fashionable. The literary art of France, however, soon reached its Gothic ultimatum; it exhausted itself in Hugo, and the unhappy results of the day are perhaps partly due to that

exhaustion. The French should find salvation in going back to the art in which they are unrivalled, that of sobriety, regularity, and skill: in the magic spell of Racine, in dexterity and reserve. That is the distinction of the Neo-Latin Camenae.

In thinking of those goddesses one is reminded of a noble family living in a Hôtel of the Faubourg St. Germain, where the back windows look on a trim parterre with clipped hedges, and those in the front on a bright street full of polite passengers. The English Muses, on the other hand, have usually been found inhabiting a country mansion, partly modernised, but having for its nucleus a feudal donjon. Some casements command the moist stretches of a misty landscape; but there are also others 'opening on the foam of perilous seas,' where the sombre sky is partly revealed, from time to time, by the magic flashes of distant lightning. Hugo went as near to this view of things as his limitations allowed; but the system was foreign, alike to the traditions and to the resources of his country's art. In a word, admitting that modern Realism has come out of the methods of Hugo and Beyle, of Balzac and Mérimée, it has been by that reaction which seems inseparable from all movements, whether the rhythm of a pendulum, or the music of the spheres.

APPENDIX.

It would not be right to close the present sketch without a word of special acknowledgment for the important work of Mr. G. Saintsbury,¹ to which we have been indebted, in more ways than one, through the whole course of our study. That acknowledgment can, fortunately, be made in the best and most agreeable manner, by simply translating part of the commentary on Mr. Saintsbury's book which appeared in *The Academy* for February 10, 1883. The article is not only by a Frenchman, but by one of the most distinguished of contemporary French men of letters, M. Paul Bourget:—

This is a work which I would wish to see translated into French, and introduced into the education of my country; so complete is it, and so superior in point of exactness and just appreciations to all the classic works of the same nature . . . The author has not felt constrained to bind himself down to a uniform method of exposition; judging with much good sense that the history of a literary period troubled as was the 16th century . . . could not be written like the history of a classic period . . . when the rules of aesthetic were extremely definite, and the personality of every writer was restrained by discipline. For this reason the Second Book, devoted to the Renaissance, is a series of monographs on different writers—Villon, Rabelais, Montaigne, and Regnier—while the Third Book and the Fourth proceed by studies of schools, and pass in review the poets and the dramatists, the novelists and the historians, the critics and the philosophers. As for the Middle

¹ *A Short History of French Literature* (2nd ed.). Oxford, 1884.

Ages, the mixture of kinds of work, and the absence of individual characters completely distinctive, have led Mr. Saintsbury to proceed without any very fixed order; whilst, for the 19th century, he has had to content himself with a sketch, because the literary development of the period is not finished.

It is not very easy to characterise in a few lines the processes of an historian who has necessarily gone over so many subjects. It appears to me that the master-quality of Mr. Saintsbury is—precision. He excels in giving in one or two pages the very substance of an author, and with one stroke defining his influence. On the other hand, the exactness of the facts is really first-rate; and the book may be consulted like a dictionary, with the certainty of finding always the little point one requires for the proper knowledge of each writer.

M. Bourget here interposes certain objections, expressing his opinion that Mr. Saintsbury, though adding to his historical qualifications those of a profound critic, neglects the task of aesthetic and philosophic criticism, and fails to give 'those general conclusions which explain literary evolution.' He says:—

Je trouve cette très-juste observation sur un des défauts habituels de l'esprit français: 'If there is one fault to be found with the creations of French literary art, it is that they run too much into types.' Ne semble-t-il pas que de telles phrases appellent une explication plus développée, et que c'était l'occasion de passer de l'effet à la cause, et d'indiquer comment l'héritage de la culture latine, le développement excessif de la vie et de la littérature de salon au dix-septième siècle, la prédominance du sens oratoire sur le sens poétique, ont contribué à façonner, dans le sens de l'abstraction, l'esprit français?

We have left these sentences in their original language from a fear of not being able to do justice to their exact meaning. Probably Mr. Saintsbury would have no difficulty in replying that the able criticism, however valuable as a generalisation, has no bearing on his book; which was limited in scope and bulk, and did not profess to be a scientific treatise, like one of M. Taine's works. M. Bourget's

detailed objections are more in place. There are, he says, a few points as to which the author must never hope to find himself in accord with French opinion; but he courteously adds that such points are very few, and that almost throughout the judgments are of a truly astonishing delicacy (*finesse*).

The first of my objections, [he adds] applies to La Fontaine, to whom Mr. Saintsbury refuses poetical power, and adds that 'he may be said to be a prose-writer . . . who chose to write in verse.' This is an opinion which no French reader of La Fontaine could admit; for, under the familiar demeanour that he affects, he has a lyric charm which is of the rarest value. Only, the lyricalness of La Fontaine is interior; a single stroke, an epithet, displays it; and at once irony steps in, and chastens the emotion. But, for all this accompaniment of irony, the lyricalness is none the less real. An excellent judge has said, 'It is La Fontaine who is our Homer.' In this writer, indeed, . . . a word suffices to call up boundless landscapes, a word is enough to create emotion. His verse is so exactly conformed to his thought, that all, in Wordsworth's phrase, is 'inevitable'; which seems the distinctive token of the true poet.

These passages (with the exception noted) have been translated because they express the judgment of an excellent native critic on a writer, whose extraordinary talent and influence have been often followed in the course of our study. La Fontaine has continued to possess, from his own time to the present, a vast popularity amongst his own countrymen. But Mr. Saintsbury was concerned to give his own opinion, not as a Frenchman, but as a representative English critic; and, in whatever light La Fontaine may be regarded, on his being called 'a French Homer,' most English readers will be disposed to make a remark similar to that of Sir Walter Scott, when some one called Joanna Baillie 'a Scottish Shakspeare.'

M. Bourget, however, goes on to make a remark which is full of truth in itself, even if not justly admissible as a reproach to Mr. Saintsbury—

It seems to me that the author is not on the right tack (*dans la vérité*) when he says, of the *Pensées* of Blaise Pascal, that they 'yield matter which will compare with the carefully concocted maxims of La Rochefoucauld or of Joubert.'

Here, surely, the meaning of Mr. Saintsbury is plain enough. He had contrasted the manner in which the *Pensées* were thrown upon paper, as rough notes to be used hereafter, with the laboured epigrams of the Marquis, and with the delicate and highly-polished sayings of the later writer. Indeed, as to Pascal, Mr. Saintsbury had, in the paragraph immediately preceding that to which his critic objects, distinctly drawn attention to the nature of the *Pensées*. 'Few, if any, of them are finally worked up into the form in which the author would have been likely to present them to the public; and, therefore, from the point of view of pure literary criticism, they require less notice here.' It seems clear that the comparison with the more studied 'thoughts' of the later writers was naturally, almost necessarily, implied, in explanation of this at first sight derogatory sentence. One or two other objections may be briefly noticed. Dumas, according to M. Bourget, ought not to be considered worthy of mention as a novelist 'equally remarkable' with Balzac. This is an obvious caution, if Mr. Saintsbury had said that the jovial mulatto was a writer of the same merit and influence as his great contemporary. But the whole tenor of Mr. Saintsbury's examination of the two makes against such a supposition. The phrase (2nd ed. p. 532) is unfortunately equivocal when taken by itself; but, on reperusal, M. Bourget would probably have little doubt as to Mr. Saintsbury's true meaning. A shot-tower is not so grand an object as St. Paul's Cathedral, and not of equal importance as a work of art. But, if it is as high or higher, it will form an 'equally remarkable' object to one navigating the river Thames. Dumas, in point of energy and force, and as regards bulk of production, is unquestionably one of the most remarkable among writers of fiction. M. Bourget also

usefully points out that Théophile Gautier was never Balzac's secretary, but only a favourite fellow-workman, chosen on account of Balzac's admiration for the style of the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. The statement has, indeed, been withdrawn since the appearance of the first edition of the *Short History*. Lastly, M. Bourget deplores the omission from the great letter-writers of the Prince de Ligne, who was so much admired by Madame de Staël, and of M. Barbey d'Aurévilly, whom he considers 'perhaps the first stylist of the present hour.' He concludes with the following well-merited tribute of approval:—

Such are the drawbacks, trifling as will be seen, which do not prevent Mr. Saintsbury's book from being a masterpiece of method and of observation, for which French writers owe him a lasting gratitude.

Appreciative testimony from such a man is the best proof of the remarkable skill and judgment which have marked the execution of a most difficult task. It is rare indeed for a foreigner to win such praise from an expert and a native.

Mr. Saintsbury's work is illustrated in a companion volume of well-selected *Specimens*. The only complaint that one could make of these might be that the reader is neither informed of the dates of the several extracts, nor of the titles of the books from which they are taken.

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